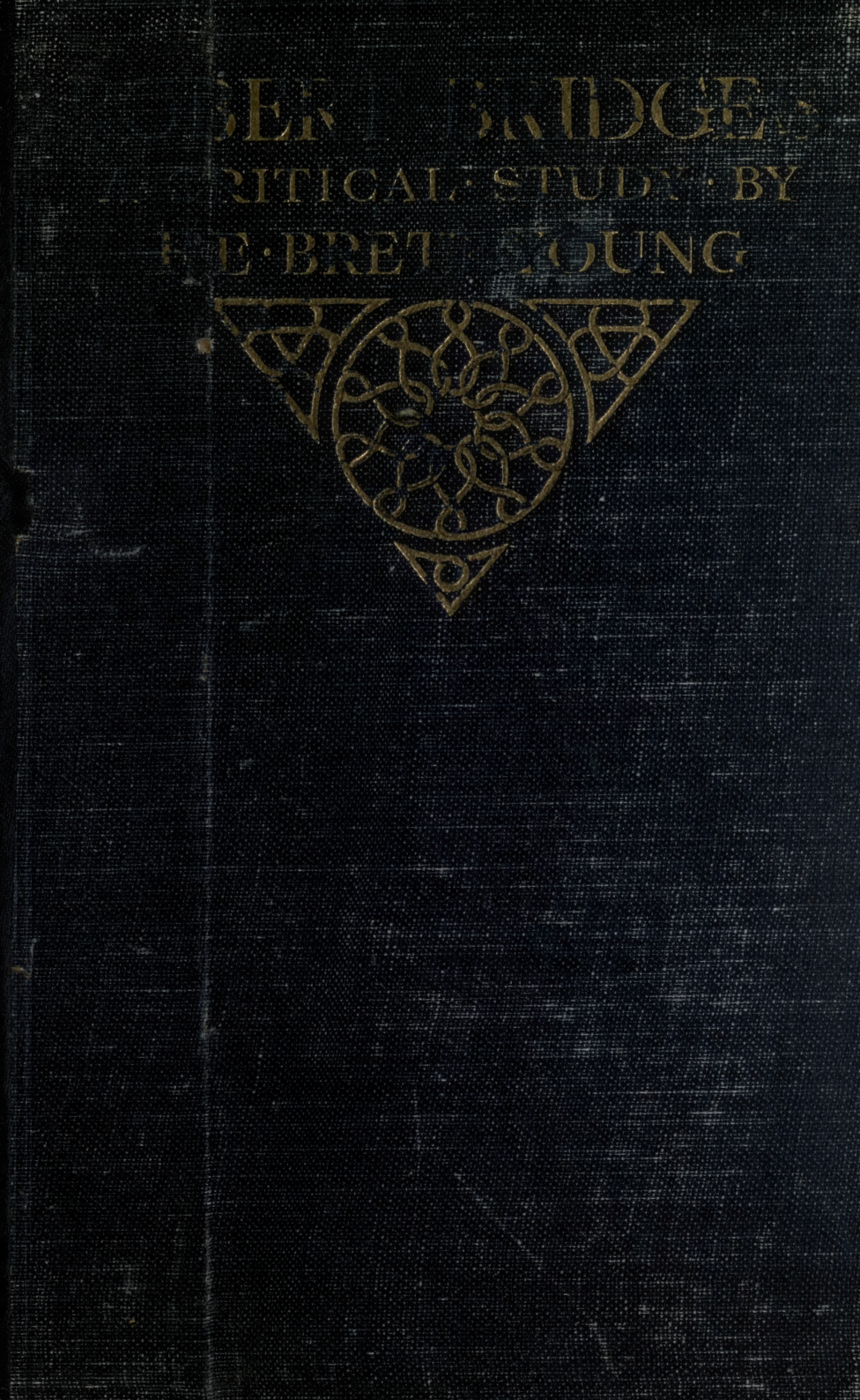

ER RIDGE
RITICAL STUDY BY
E·BRET HARTE

ROBERT BRIDGES

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME:

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HENRY JAMES
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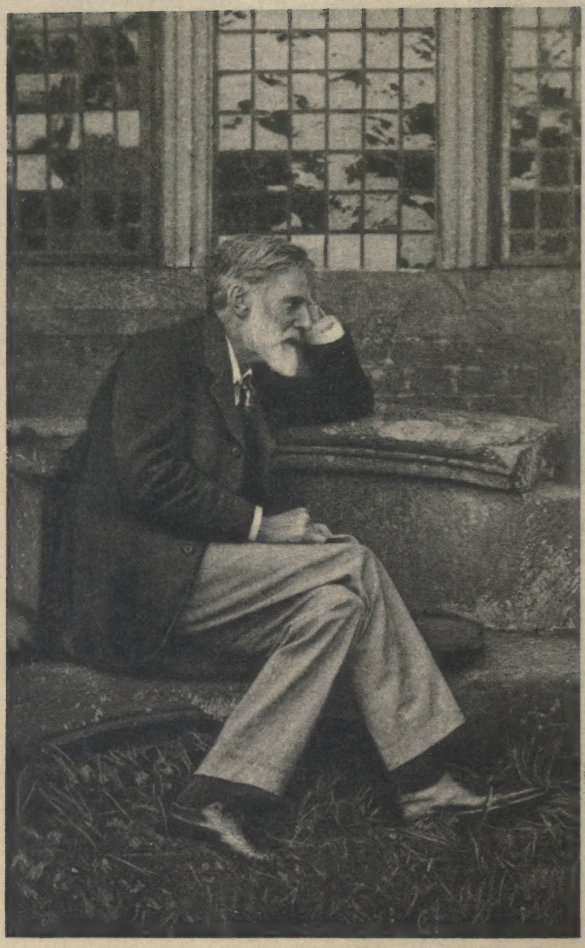
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Robert Bridges.
from a photograph 1913.

ROBERT BRIDGES

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

F. (E.) BRETT YOUNG

167370.
16/11/21

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TO

ALFRED HAYES

GENTLE POET AND

STERN CRITIC

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NOTE

I HAVE thought it better, in this estimate of a living poet, to exclude biographical details altogether; and indeed they would have been out of place in a book which is nothing more than an attempt to explain to my own satisfaction the peculiar excellences which have made the work of Robert Bridges so great a personal joy, and to examine my belief in its significance for the future of English poetry.

I have to thank Dr. Bridges for his generous permission to quote not only many passages from his own works, but also the sonnet of his friend, the late Mr. Gerard Hopkins, on page 143. Except in the case of the Plays, the text from which quotations have been made is that of the Oxford Edition of Collected Poems.

F. E. B. Y.

LLANTHONY,
July, 1914.

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I

PRELIMINARIES

THE vitality of any art-form is seen in the willingness of the artist to be engrossed in the complex and the intense, and it is in this spirit that he must approach the expression of beauty, which is the main business of art and also happens to be a great deal of the business of life. As soon as beauty engages more than a certain part of the attention, or offers more than one aspect to the same perception, its expression becomes art. One might almost say that to voice a single aspect of beauty is common speech, to voice two at once is art. But in the higher forms of art we look for more than this. It may express the intensity with which beauty is realized; and this the poets call Joy. It may recognize the indestructible kinship of all beauty, and give expression to the underlying unity, whether it be real or imaginary; and this is generally called Vision. Sometimes it reconciles things which have seemed distant or opposed; and

when this is achieved in literature it is called the note of Ecstasy. The three functions keep a certain sequence. The ecstasy of one artist is handed down as the vision of those who come after him, and in the end may be taken into the general consciousness of beauty. The ecstatic artist comes rarely; he is an adventurer in art; he generally starves or dies young, for the world has naturally no use for him.

It is not joy, nor even ecstasy, but vision that distinguishes the golden ages of art. We know them by the number of worshippers that throng the temple. They are periods marked by an extraordinary flowering of song, when every little singer is inspired, as if in spite of himself, to utter the authentic accents of genius. They are times when it is not necessary for a man to be an artist by stealth. There is breadth, and grandeur, and a certain unmistakable sanity about the art of these ages. It springs from the joy of some obscure half-realized discovery. By some means all things have fallen naturally into the sphere of art; art has become easy.

The age of Wordsworth was the last of these great fruiting-times of English literature. It was less astonishing than the Elizabethan age, for it took a less soaring flight from the

level that came before it. But the later achievement includes the earlier. The poetic method of Shakespeare was taken for granted by Shelley at a time when the technique of the Elizabethans had already been absorbed and half forgotten. This age had all the features of a great period of literature. It was restless, but confident; it was lacking in several qualities of which the present age has enough—humour, notably,—but it had a confident tread in places where we can venture only timidly or not at all. The age of the great Romantics gave way to an empty clamour of tongues. It merged in the Victorian compromise—an admirable phrase which covers the whole field of literature to the work of Rossetti, of the æsthetics, of Browning, Tennyson and Swinburne. "The sunset of the great revolutionary poets," Mr. Chesterton calls it; and as a type of it he presents to us Lord Macaulay. It was an age when politics and literature were confused to the damning of both, and to the loss of vision, joy and beauty. It stops short of Bridges.

He is one of these isolated poets whom it is difficult to classify unless it be with the isolated poets of other ages. Time has a freakish way of mixing up her great men. The first historian to analyse the dynamics of

literary movements will often have to search back for poets who are separated from their real companions by a mass of little names. Sometimes he will have to pick up stragglers who are born a generation too late. The true account of each great age of literature will begin with the voices crying in the wilderness. For instance, the first poet of the greatest age of English letters was beheaded six years before the birth of Shakespeare.

Wyatt and Surrey have been called the first of the moderns; and Surrey is remembered in text-books of literature because he naturalized the Italian sonnet in the English tongue. But there are points in his work which I find more significant. The concentration of his genius upon the forms of the great Italians showed not merely a leavening of English poetry with European culture. It implied a ruthless discontent with the models of his time. It embodied, too, great technical innovations. Surrey was the first poet to free the natural rhythms of English speech from the five-foot prison of the "iambic" line. He proclaimed distantly, and in a voice that sometimes faltered, a new joy which became the commonplace of the great Elizabethans; and at the same time he kept his eyes steadfastly upon the golden times that had come before

him. For Surrey was a "classicist," and has left us a long version of Vergil. I am ready to believe that the court of Henry VIII, if it cared for these things, took the learning of those two young men for pedantry. They may even have been accused of a "cold carpentry of metre." But to-day we know that they were seeking for new beauty to express, and that their zeal for ancient models was a token of their impatience.[1]

William Collins is another of these poets whose importance has sometimes been overstated; yet he is very significant, as every real poet must be in an age of sham poets. Augustan art had fallen into a groove, or rather it had lodged on a see-saw. The infant successors of Vergil and Horace lisped in heroic couplets, for the heroic couplets came. The revolt of Collins took the same channels as the revolt of Wyatt and Surrey. He looked for beauty in the ancient perfection of form—the *prisca symmetria* bewailed by one of the boldest innovators of the Renaissance.

> O bid our vain endeavours cease
> Revive the just designs of Greece,

[1] In this connection it does not seem inopportune to quote the case of a daring innovator in another art, Richard Strauss, a post-Wagnerian, who first chose to write music in the manner of Mozart; or that of Arnold Schönberg, who declares that he has learnt all he knows from a study of the music of Bach, of Mozart, of Beethoven, and of Brahms.

he cried; and later, impatient of the maddening mechanism of his contemporaries, he breaks into the soft unrimed stanza of the Ode to Evening which so nearly discards the whole Augustan burden of romance words. This gentle poem is one of the most rebellious things in literature. Here the lovely English words are allowed to speak for themselves; the English landscape (Swinburne compares him with Corot) is unveiled as it had never been since the enchanting morning of L'Allegro. Try to transpose

> upland fallows grey
> Reflect its last cool gleam,

or

> And hamlets brown and dim-discovered spires

into the Augustan key.

But the Ode to Evening was written in 1747, when Chatterton was still to pave the way for the Eve of St. Agnes in a Ballade of Charity, and Thomson and Shenstone were slipping their chains in the Spenserian stanza. A little later William Blake was to bring the aureole of mysticism into the language. And yet Blake and Collins were reactionaries in the strictest sense of the word before they were innovators. They are not even among the greatest poets. But they were dazzled with a

new joy, a wakening consciousness of beauty, which was to find its full expression long after they were silent. These poets of joy, these singers before sunrise, are naturally dissatisfied with the worn poetic methods of their time, and as naturally turn their eyes back to greater models. It was this discontent which turned Blake to the form of the Elizabethan lyric. It made him complain to the Muses to whom it was then fashionable to pay court :—

> How have you left your ancient love
> That bards of old enjoyed in you ?
> The languid strings do scarcely move,
> The sound is forced, the notes are few.

Robert Bridges was born in 1844, of a Kentish family. He was six years old when the Poet Laureate sealed his fame with In Memoriam, and twenty-six when the Idylls were finished. His own first volume of verse was published in 1873. Tennyson, Browning, Arnold and Rossetti were still writing, but the dread Victorian era was at an end, though Mr. William Watson had yet to appear, and Swinburne was still regarded with suspicion in respectable circles.

His work has been issued for the most part privately, and has been appreciated by a very

small circle of readers. His recognition by literary men of the day has been narrower even than his reputation. His published work includes seven plays modelled directly, even to details of stage-craft, upon either the Elizabethan manner or a mixture of any manners but the modern; one that is derived from Terence's Heautontimorumenos, and is partly a translation; two masks in the Greek manner; a long version of Vergil in classical prosody; and five little books of *Shorter Poems*, which are curiously divided; they are either direct formal imitations of Victorian and Elizabethan models, or they are written in a manner so entirely fresh and original, with such advanced technical skill, that we feel the innovator and the inventor in every line.

Indeed, Bridges' discontent with the models of his day is the most obvious feature of his work. If he was brought up on Tennyson and Browning, the result has been a complete breaking away from the methods of both. From the first his eyes have been fixed on the great ages of literature. He could not breathe the atmosphere of the drawing-room. I suppose it is natural enough that this tendency, though it is only half his significance as a poet, should have hoodwinked a great part of

contemporary criticism. It is this that has stamped him as a poet of the study, a reactionary, a worker in old claims, a "classical revivalist."

He is all this, but a great deal more. There is that in his work which has not been heard in English poetry since Shelley died—the note of joy. With it and supporting it is an intenser perception of beauty than any of our poets has shown us since the Romantic movement fell into its Victorian decay.

> My soul is drunk with joy; her new-born fire
> In far forbidden places wanders away . . .

is the text of half his lyric discoveries. The sense of beauty ever-present, intense and transient, drifts over all his work. With Keats he has loved the principle of beauty in all things; and he has felt, as perhaps only Keats before him, the pains of beauty—the "no-formed stings" that Whitman found in the perception of loveliness. "Sense is so tender," he cries

> O, and hope so high,
> That common pleasures mock their hope and sense;
> And swifter than doth lightning from the sky
> The ecstasy they pine for flashes hence,
> Leaving the darkness and the woe immense.

But it is of the sunlight and the earth he

sings. If he is a poet of the study he is much more a poet of field and hedgerow. He is the first man to bring the atmosphere of the English landscape into poetry with all its delicate changes and shifting colour. The impetus of the romantic movement, of Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Coleridge, was so strong that even in Tennyson's day English poetry had not drifted so far from nature as in the Augustan era. But the Victorian convention was wearing thin, and the first three books of *Shorter Poems* were as direct a return to natural beauty as Collins' Ode to Evening. There is a new freshness of vision, a power of direct expression, which lets a flood of fresh air into contemporary art. With it, too, is a perception of the beauty of simple words which is quite foreign to late Victorian poetry.

Here is a man whose work includes the old paradox of great beginnings. For the spirit, and partly for the form, of his poetry, he stands already high enough to look back unhindered at the great ages behind him and to refer his work to lasting models; and at the same time he has evolved a form and a spirit essentially new. As a poet he is not among the greatest; he treads too deliberately the middle course between imagination and fact, without the

inclusive vision that is the crowning glory of the classic style. He lacks, too, the sustained ecstasy of imagination which is the birthright of the greatest poets. And his genius has an indolent cast, as though he were content merely to seize what he may of a constant flow of beautiful impressions and to fit it to the most beautiful and varied language.

But of the real stuff of poetry, of beauty, and of joy, of perfect sympathy and expression, he brings us more than any poet since Keats, whom he so nearly approaches in sheer grace and richness of diction. As a lyric poet he is more consistently fine than Keats; as a metrist he is with Milton. Most of his collected *Shorter Poems* have, I think, the authentic accent of immortal verse. One can only guess how far this originality of metre and the precision and sincerity of his Nature poems may form the basis for a new school of English verse. No great poet of his class, isolated, at once revivalist and inventor, has yet failed sooner or later to influence the growth of our literature, and a new flowering of English poetry has been long delayed.

II

THE RELIGION OF LOVE

THREE years after the date of his first published work, a now extinct collection of lyrical poems, printed in 1873, the first sonnets of *The Growth of Love* appeared. Robert Bridges was in his thirty-third year. He had reached a season of life to which neither Keats nor Shelley ever attained; one at which Coleridge's year of marvels had closed, and the Sybilline leaves of his friend had all been scattered. It is representative of the serious temper of the man that this blossoming should have been so long withheld, for the flower of poetry is one that tends to burst so early from its sheath. Neither the technique nor yet, in any great degree, the matter of *The Growth of Love* suggests the work of a young man: there is so little in it that one could wish, in the light of later work, remoulded or unwritten. And yet he does not overwhelm us with any "high midsummer pomps" of song. His genius awakens with the slow unfolding of a Northern

spring, beneath skies of a chilly tenderness. Poetry, with him, is from the first a sober ecstasy, shrinking from fine extravagance as from a breach of taste, and from the mere sensuous indulgence of words as from a lapse in the ideal of conduct which his ἦθος already defines.

Here, indeed, is one of the tokens of youth, that absorption in a moral idea which in Shelley became "a passion for reforming the world"; but in Bridges the passion is limiting rather than expansive. There is a staidness, a conscious severity in these sonnets which seems strange in the work of a young man, and stranger still in the treatment of such a subject: for love, that Lord of Terrible Aspect, is here compelled to take its place in a sort of religious scheme, of which itself is the crown and fulfilment. This conception obviously suggests a comparison with the imaginative love of the great Florentines; and while they are too individual to be called derivative, it is fair to say that these sonnets carry a strong Renaissance flavour. Sometimes they are as sweet and pensive as Dante; ardent sometimes with that vague desire for abstract beauty which quivers beneath the passive sonnets of Michaelangelo. And the author must have been conscious of his models, for

in the seventh of the set he hints that the joy of Love is surely bringing him towards

> A grace of silence by the Greek unguesst
> That bloom'd to immortalize the Tuscan style.

Within his limitations he has succeeded in this. Nowhere else, save in the Vita Nuova, does love, and love that never wholly loses touch with humanity, rise so nearly to the dignity of a religion. At times the intense seriousness of these early sonnets threatens to hide the lover in the vestments of the priest. And I think it is this lofty sacramental feeling which invests each of these poems, even the more trivial and tender, with their strange solemnity; as though the whole world were, to him, a temple of love, and he the celebrant of an austere ritual.

In common with most religions his ecstasy is made a means of escape from life; for

> . . . man hath sped his instinct to outgo
> The step of science; and against her shames
> Imagination stakes out heavenly claims,
> Building a tower above the head of woe.

Or again :—

> Thy smile outfaceth ill, and that old feud
> Twixt things and me is quash'd in our new truce.

In one of the loveliest sestets in the language

he tells of the bewildering calm to which, through love, he may attain :—

> And when we sit alone, and as I please
> I taste thy love's full smile and can enstate
> The pleasure of my kingly heart at ease,
> My thought swims like a ship, that with the weight
> Of her rich burden sleeps on the infinite seas
> Becalm'd, and cannot stir her golden freight.

Even when he breathes that diviner air he is conscious of the perilous height at which his ideals are poised: "Yet lieth the greater bliss so far aloof, that few there be are weaned from earthly love," he sings; and a little later he shies again at those "whom the flames of earthly love devour." It seems as if there were no room in his scheme of spiritualized love for many of the themes on which poetry has fed ever since the springtime of song; as if the bulk of English love-poetry, from the Elizabethans to Swinburne, were judged by him as lacking in essential fastidiousness; as if even the Renaissance were a little too frank. It is not until we reach the first Epistle in Classical Prosody, published thirty years later, that we learn anything of Love's

> Joys that fear to be named, feelings too holy to gaze on;
> And with his inviolate peace-triumph his passionate war;
> . . . his mighty desire, thrilling ecstasies, ardours
> Of mystic reverence, his fierce flame-eager emotions,
> Idolatrous service, blind faith and ritual of fire.

In his age he stands within hand-clasp of Whitman. Here is the substitute of youth for those fierce, flame-eager lines :—

> The mystery of joy made manifest
> In love's self-answering and awakening smile ;
> Whereby the lips in wonder reconcile
> Passion with peace, and show desire at rest.

And I suppose it is because he has made of love a religion that we meet with this unusual element in the early work ; for every religion wins to its ecstasies by virtue of some renunciation, and he has reconciled passion with peace by sacrificing some of its ardours. But there are varieties of religious experience. Keats, whom we shall shortly see that Bridges has handled somewhat roughly, also thought of love as a religion.

" My creed is love," he wrote to Fanny Brawne, " and you are its only tenet." Perhaps Keats' conception of love's religion was Eleusinian. Bridges' is more nearly love according to the Book of Common Prayer.

This Puritanism, as it has been called, crops up so freely in the early sonnets and has been so often remarked as to be worth considering further, for it persists throughout the mass of his love-poetry into the critical essays, the plays, and the version of Apuleius. Even the *Later Poems*, in which the temple of love has

grown mellow and beautiful with age, are not free from it. At the outset it is to be distinguished from the puritanism of reaction which chastened the later years of Wagner and Tolstoi, for that was an index of failing powers, of sheer physical exhaustion; as again it differs from the white-hot Platonism of the youthful Shelley with its far intenser flame. It is partly an instinctive modesty, partly an expression of good breeding; and it gives me the idea not merely of a spiritual aristocracy nor yet entirely of a moral, but a blend of both: a sort of aristocracy of manners. It is a quality that is unimaginable in a continental literature; insular, egotistic, tinged with that spiritual isolation which I have already noticed; and, on the surface, it might be explained by saying that Bridges was a Victorian poet. For however much we may attribute his early avoidance of the physical in his love-poetry to a conscious choice and rejection of material from the standpoint of poetics, we cannot forget that he was born into an age which worshipped the proprieties to a positively indecent extent. The ideals to which his generation raised their eyes were the ideals of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and Mr. Samuel Smiles; and while the national science devoted its energies to the making of fortunes

in hardware and woollen goods, the national art accepted a reactionary standard of prudery compared with which the art of any period, except that of Cromwell's Commonwealth, was licentious. In spite of all this, I believe we can neglect the influence of the era on Bridges' poetry. The Victorians were as little his teachers in manners as they were his masters in technique; and I think the very individuality of that technique, its colour, its clarity, its virginal sweet air, were enough to cleanse it of that taint. There is in these poems a sincerity of outlook which makes the loves of their Galahads and Arthurs seem shoddy. I have spoken already of the Victorian compromise. The puritanism of Bridges is uncompromising, and, differing thus subtly from the attitude of his contemporaries, he has carried his fastidious taste unchanged into an age in which reticence is not a characteristic of our poetry. From the essay on Keats, one gathers that Bridges himself appreciated the uncleanness of the Victorian veneer. This work is, in a way, an apologia for his own attitude, and no one reading can doubt that it rings true.

A lamentable deficiency in Keats' art which vitiates much of his work is brought into unusual

prominence by the subject of Endymion, and that is his very superficial and unworthy treatment of his ideal female characters. It might be partly accounted for thus: Keats' art is primarily objective and pictorial, and whatever other qualities it has are as it were added on to things as perceived; and this requires a satisfactory pictorial basis, which, in the case of ideal woman, did not exist in Keats' time. Neither the Roman nor the Renaissance ideals were understood, and the thin convention of classicism which we may see in the works of West and Canova, was played out; so that the rising artists (and Keats with them), finding "nothing to be intense upon," turned to Nature, and produced from English models the domestic-belle type, which ruled throughout the second quarter of the century, degrading our poets as well as our painters. It was banal, and the more ideal and abstract it sought to be the more empty it became, so that it was the portrait-painters only, like Lawrence, who, having to do with individual expression of subjective qualities, escaped from the meanness, and represented women whom we can still admire. . . . Keats deplores, in one of his letters, that he was not at ease in women's society, and when he attributes this to their not answering to his preconception of them, it looks as if he were seeking his ideal among them. Certainly what appears to be the delineation of his conception often offends taste without raising the imagination, and it reveals a plainly impossible foundation for dignified passion, in the representation of which Keats failed. I conclude that he supposed that common expressions became spiritualized by

being applied to an idea. Whatever praise is given to Keats' work must always be with this reservation ; and he generally does his best where there is no opportunity for this kind of fault.

One feels that all this is rather hard upon the consumptive chemist's assistant. Keats was never a favourite of the critics ; and when one turns in pity from this essay to the pages of Endymion, and finds there poetry, " simple, sensuous, impassioned," as Milton would have had it, and very passable goddesses too, the question rises whether the careful avoidance of " this kind of fault " in the love-poetry of Bridges does not constitute a defect. The wonder is that with a passion which is literally incomplete he remains so great a love poet. " Dignified passion " is the phrase. He is ashamed

> To have usèd means to win so pure acquist.

His tears even

> were proud drops, and had my leave to fall,
> Not on thy pity for my pain to call.

In another sonnet he finds it necessary to make excuses for writing love-poetry at all. All through the first part of *The Growth of Love* runs this haughty disdain of emotion,

haughty because it obviously subserves a spiritual egotism :—

> She loves me first because I love her, then
> Loves me for knowing why she should be loved,
> And that I love to praise her, loves again. . . .

I have dwelt at some length upon this aspect of the sonnets not only because the later conception of Love is no more than a logical development from the first type, but also because it explains, by inference, a good deal of the difficulty which some readers and critics have found in getting into touch with his work. Many writers have called him cold, and it is obvious that the appeal of poets whose works do not show them as " men of like passions " with ourselves is limited. I think the word " shy " more nearly represents the idiosyncrasy of his work. " Somewhat shy, somewhat austere, fastidious, difficult," says his friend the President of Magdalen, hinting at qualities which are by no means rare in the English temperament though seldom present in our literature. And the only key to the understanding of such poetry or of such a temperament is love.

The earlier sonnets show all these qualities in a high degree, for though he is undoubtedly " master of the art which for thy sake I

serve," the attitude of mind is self-conscious; but the twenty-third sonnet of the set, which seems to usher in a second period, shows us for the first time the poet uncertain of himself, doubting whether his search for the face of beauty without blame will ever lead him to happiness.

> O weary pilgrims, chanting of your woe,
> That turn your eyes to all the peaks that shine,
> Hailing in each the citadel divine,
> The which ye thought to have enter'd long ago;
> Until at length your feeble steps and slow
> Falter upon the threshold of the shrine,
> And your hearts overburdened doubt in fine
> Whether it be Jerusalem or no:
>
> Disheartened pilgrims, I am one of you;
> For, having worshipp'd many a barren face,
> I scarce now greet the goal I journey'd to:
> I stand a pagan in the holy place;
> Beneath the lamp of truth I am found untrue,
> And question with the God that I embrace.

It would be as unprofitable and indelicate to reconstruct a love-story from this series of sonnets as it would be to set down in prose the emotional history of the hero of Maud; but I do think it significant that as the poems stand in sequence they express a real development of the ideal of love in depth and in humanity; so that the title of the work becomes something more than an apt heading in

capital letters. *The Growth of Love* is not merely a chronicle of the poetical moods which chequer a love-story, like several of the famous sequences with which it has been compared, but a true history of the psychology of love. This philosophical basis gives it the most vital kind of form; and there is more of the essence of drama in it than in all the dramatic works put together. The throes of wounded pride in the thirty-second sonnet :—

> Thus to be humbled : 'tis to be undone ;
> A forest fell'd ; a city razed to ground . . .

with its triumphant climax :—

> And yet, O lover, thee, the ruined one,
> Love who hath humbled thus hath also crown'd—

together with the manly and tender humility of the thirty-third, seem an inevitable prologue to the radiant fervour of the next :—

> *O my goddess divine* sometimes I say :—
> Now let this word for ever and all suffice ;
> Thou art insatiable, and yet not twice
> Can even thy lover give his soul away :
> And for my acts, that at thy feet I lay ;
> For never any other, by device
> Of wisdom, love or beauty, could entice
> My homage to the measure of this day.
>
> I have no more to give thee : lo, I have sold
> My life, have emptied out my heart, and spent

Whate'er I had ; till like a beggar, bold
With nought to lose, I laugh and am content.
A beggar kisses thee ; nay, love, behold,
I fear not : thou too are in beggarment.

I would commend the examination of this poem to those who have found the art of Robert Bridges a " cold carpentry of metre " : this magnificent white-hot thing, simple, strong, yet passionately abandoned. It has very few equals in the history of the sonnet. The glow which it sheds before it irradiates all that immediately follows. The next sonnets are all sunny and serene : a record of the sweetest love in idleness.

Simple enjoyment calm in its excess,
With not a grief to cloud, and not a ray
Of passion over hot my peace to oppress ;
With no ambition to reproach delay,
Nor rapture to disturb its happiness.

Until, a little later, there gather on the horizon of this cloudless sky faint vapours, such as those which tenderly mark the close of a day in high summer. It is a wistfulness not new in literature, this sense of tears which haunts the silences of extreme happiness. I suppose the contemplation of the highest beauty in art or nature is never wholly free from it, and it is fitting that the new note should follow the rapture of that exalted

period. In literature it has usually voiced a regret for beauty's mortality; it has been a conscious reaching back towards the "good moment," as though it were possible for imagination to span the gap, to clutch at fast-receding joys and even to recapture them. Wordsworth had it in the great Immortality ode :—

> It is not now as it hath been of yore ;
> Turn wheresoe'er I may
> By night or day
> The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

Cowper just failed to grasp it in the lines on looking at his mother's portrait. But the wistfulness of Bridges is less regretful than either of these. With him, the desire to recapture "passèd joy" is not so much envious as compassionate. The innocence of childhood seems to him a theme for pity; just as familiar things, such as a beloved village lost in a darkening plain, will seem pitiable by reason of their very distance. And it is the loss of innocence rather than the loss of vision that he deplores. Looking at a picture of himself in childhood he feels

> He cannot think the simple thought which play'd
> Upon those features then so frank and coy ;
> 'Tis his, yet oh ! not his : and o'er the joy
> His fatherly pity bends in tears dismay'd.

And when he sees childhood upon the threshold of experience, knowing how

> in the forest among many trees
> Scarce one in all is found that hath made good
> The virgin pattern of its slender wood—

he cries :

> So, little children, ye, nay nay, ye ne'er
> From me shall learn how sure the change and nigh.
> When ye shall share our strength and mourn to share.

The softening of regret with pity is the broad distinction, in this case, between Bridges and Wordsworth ; and here, as I have already noted, it is in the want of a mystical faculty, in the overburdening of the poetic thought with a moral idea, that he falls short of Wordsworth's magic. Once, and only once, does he allow us the atmosphere of wonder without a make-weight.

> When ancient nature was all new and gay,
> Light as the fashion that doth last enthral,—
> Ah mighty nature, when, my heart was small,
> Nor dream'd what fearful searchings underlay
> The flowers and leafy ecstasy of May,
> The breathing summer sloth, the scented fall. . . .

And this does not suggest Wordsworth so much as Traherne. This is how Traherne puts it in his third century of meditations : " Certainly Adam in Paradise had not more sweet

and curious apprehensions of the world than I when I was a child. . . . I was a little stranger which, at my entrance into the world, was saluted and surrounded with innumerable joys. . . . All things were spotless and pure and glorious; yea, and infinitely mine and joyful and precious. I knew not that there were any sins, or complaints, or laws. I dreamed not of poverties, contention, or vices. All tears and quarrels were hidden from mine eyes. Everything was at rest, free and immortal. . . . So that with much ado I was corrupted and made to learn the dirty devices of this world." . . .

"Dusty damned experience" is what Bridges calls them. Under the same heading as these poems on childhood falls the magnificent portrait of a mother: "Tears of love, tears of joy and tears of care"; and I suppose that the first feeling which inspires all of them is really nothing more than the Chaucerian "Routhe"; the *piétà* of Dante and Michaelangelo; the "pity" which Bridges himself addresses in the *Christian Captives*—"sweet pity, of human sorrow born," that makes

> The heart of man so singular, that he alone
> Himself commiserating against heaven
> Pushes complaint, and finds within his heart
> Room for all creatures, that like him are born
> To suffer and perish. . . .

With almost every sonnet of the series his love seems to gather a little more of the humanity which at first was lacking. The complacent arrogance of the early poems is softened. He rails against " prodigal nature " who " makes us but to taste one perfect joy." From this " neglected, ruin'd edifice Of works imperfected and broken schemes " comes the bitter call :

> Where is the promise of my early dreams ;
> The smile of beauty and the pearl of price ?

The forty-seventh sonnet : " Since then 'tis only pity looking back, Fear looking forward," is a cry out of the deep. There is only one balm for such suffering as this. The beautiful invocation to Sleep, more tired and more tender than that of Sydney, brings darkness upon this mood of fretfulness : the only passage of the kind that breaks the consistent optimism of Bridges' work.

> Come, gentle sleep, I woo thee : come and take
> Not now the child into thine arms, from fright
> Composed by drowsy tune and shaded light,
> Whom ignorant of thee thou didst nurse and make ;
> Nor now the boy, who scorn'd thee for the sake
> Of growing knowledge or mysterious night,
> Tho' with fatigue thou didst his limbs invite,
> And heavily weigh the eyes that would not wake ;

No, nor the man severe, who from his best
Failing, alert fled to thee, that his breath,
Blood, force and fire should come at morn redrest;
But me, from whom thy comfort tarrieth,
For all my wakeful prayer sent without rest
To thee, O shew and shadow of my death.

"O shew and shadow of my death"—again the voice is the voice of Dante.

And after this there is nothing that is not sunny and beautiful and wise; for hope, "beyond the best of art or nature's kindest phase," returns; and joy, a nobler, maturer joy, a new tower above the head of woe, rises from the ruins of the old egotism. All is tender and strong: out of his strength comes forth sweetness. The simple and lovely paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer ends the sequence.

III

BEAUTY AND JOY

THE lyrics of Robert Bridges, almost alone of his work, have commanded a certain amount of popular attention, if not of fame. Since the publication of the first four books of *Shorter Poems*, in 1890, no fewer than seven reprints have appeared. After some twenty years of obscurity, the *Shorter Poems* have found another score years of comparatively vigorous life upon the lips of men. One suspects that even so they have appealed only to a small company, however devoted. Possibly, again, they have been widely read and loved by a public that has quite failed to appreciate the richness of its possession; for an unaffected love of nature and of nature-poems is far commoner in this country than the difficult art of reading poetry for its own sake.

At any rate, these five books of short poems, hardly one of which covers more than a small page, have entirely eclipsed the whole mass of

the poet's work in the public view. For one reader who has worked his way through the five thousand odd lines of *Nero*, there must be a score who have most of the *Shorter Poems* by heart. No judgment is so unerringly accurate as that of a small and constant public. It has been claimed that the lyrics have bulked unfairly in criticism and appreciation of the poet; but I believe that they will be held just as representative of Bridges' genius fifty years hence, when the plays, sonnets and masks will have had ample time to filter into public consciousness.

That they will be popular with the popularity of entire understanding and love is, so long as the common conception of poetic technique and worth stands at its present indefinite pitch, in the nature of things impossible. Their present appeal is that of simplicity, of sincerity, of general grace of diction and charm of manner. No volume of lyrics ever published has been so free from what is weak, undesirable, or the product of some chance, deceiving inspiration, which seems on the morrow like "the empty words of a dream remembered on waking." Each is, of its kind, perfect; and even to-day perfection of kind is recognized where its means are not understood.

But it is not by such a standard that they ought to be judged. They hold actually, and for reasons that can be definitely written down, the flower of Bridges' work. In that higher court in which poets judge poetry, and time ponderously endorses the verdict, the *Shorter Poems* will take their place infallibly, acquitted of blemish, affectation, untruth, fashion and littleness, among the finest products of English genius. They are simple, with the fine simplicity of the Greek anthology; they have a poetic richness and warmth of colour unknown since Keats; and they show the unfailing moral dignity which Voltaire assigned as the special birthright of the English poets. They hold concentrated the joy and vision that belong to an age of poetic awakening. When they are imitative it is with the love of great periods of literature which is characteristic of a poet in Bridges' position. And alongside this tradition which asserts, in a manner, the continuity of fine literature, is an intense originality in technique, an adaptation of form to matter, which has hardly been approached since the golden age of Latin poetry. These special poetic virtues are better seen in the *Shorter Poems* than in any of the less spontaneous work. They are least laboured when they are most

harmonious and subtle. And they are more purely concerned with the beautiful than the work of any of the poet's contemporaries or successors. Their fault, if it is to be so considered, is a feeling of remoteness, even in the most actual of the poems; a sense that Bridges' instrument, with all its delicate resources and exquisite stops, is something lacking in volume and tone. And this, as I have suggested, seems to be inseparable from the poet's method.

"This man has put into his verse," says Arthur Symons, in his fine essay, "only what remains when all the others have finished. It is a kind of essence; it is what is imperishable in perfume. It is what is nearest in words to silence." And I think this is a very fair summary of the materials out of which Bridges has made his poetry. It argues the same deliberate choice and rejection which we have noticed in the earlier work, the same groping after new modes of expression, which are the signals of his discontent. It means that he has definitely thrown overboard a great part of the accepted stuff of poetry. "Beauty," he tells us, is "the best of all we know"; and in his passion for dealing with nothing that is unworthy he has made sacrifices which would have been the wrecking of a

lesser poet. Seeking the subtle beauties of new rhythms and strange technical beauties he has wandered far: indeed, I think that whole new tracts of loveliness have opened before him; but in the choice of themes he has restricted the field of poetry more than any of his peers, rarely venturing forth in search of the unusual, being contented within the limits of the homeliest joys.

I have already spoken of his distaste for the physical. In all the poems there is only one reference to Nature's wonder of arch-wonders, "her fair animal life"; and that is in the *Epistle II*, where it is evident that he allows himself an unusual latitude of theme. Even in *Eros and Psyche*, a poem that lies steeped in lazy Cretan sunshine, the unveiled beauty of a woman's form never shines among the olives. So, with the mighty ardours of physical passion he puts away the tenderness of maternity. Even the pageants of history do not call him save in the minute methods of *Nero;* while heroism in the abstract is forgone, for the poems of the Boer war are intensely personal in feeling, and hardly happy in expression. Just as Bridges can speak of

> . . . the Dutchman's implacable folly
> The country of Shakespeare defying

Tennyson writes of Napoleon :—

> He thought to quell the stubborn hearts of oak,
> Madman !

But Tennyson also wrote The Revenge and the Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington, while in the very next poem to the unfortunate Buonaparte sonnet he proclaims Alexander "Warrior of God." Here is Bridges' opinion of the two of them :—

> What was Alexander's subduing of Asia, or that
> Sheep-worry of Europe, when pigmy Napoleon enter'd
> Her sovereign chambers, and her kings with terror eclips'd ?
> His footsore soldiers inciting across the ravag'd plains
> Thro' bloody fields of death tramping to an ugly disaster ?
> Shows any crown, set above the promise (so rudely accomplisht)
> Of their fair godlike young faces, a glory to compare
> With the immortal olive that circles bold Galileo's
> Brows. . . ."

This is his poetical substitute for the heroics of war. And since the conflagrations of human passion and the heroes which emerge from them fire him so little, it is natural that heroic associations should not move him either. It may be urged that these things are only a small part of the stuff from which lyrics are made. Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne, in very different ways, have proved that the

lyric may be essentially dramatic in form; and it is notable that from the lyrics of Robert Bridges the more heroic moments of the human drama are absent. He puts behind him also the whole tradition of Romantic beauty; beauty, that is, which is reinforced by association; and with it magical beauty of the Christabel type, and the beauty of the eerie, which he essays once, and bungles, in the poem on *Screaming Tarn*. So much of the old material he has sacrificed. What has he left us; and can there be any beauty that is new?

I will grant that in these *Shorter Poems* it would be difficult to hit upon anything that is specifically modern (although their flavour is as modern as Euripides), and yet there is just as little that can be called ancient. "Timeless," is one of his favourite adjectives; and the beauty in which he rejoices is generally without time. Even in poetical material there is such a thing as fashion. The sorrow of Werther belongs as distinctly to the eighteenth century as the sorrow of Priam over the body of Hector belongs to none; and it is in the latter category that I would place the bulk of the beauty which Bridges uses. Of such is the imperishable stuff of poetry. Within these, his own limits, there is little

beauty that he has not made more lovely; for the things of which he writes come to one with the poignance of a personal experience.

It is evident, too, that he appreciates simple beauties, or groups of simple beauties, rather than the complex; and to him the appeal of these is so strong that he holds them self-sufficient. No poet but Wordsworth has leaned upon them so confidently without calling in extraneous appeals to increase or intensify their meaning. I think that a part of the great strength of his poetry lies in these very limitations. The beauty of which he sings is that of unalterable things: the nightingales of Heracleitus; the sharp-prowed ships of Homer; fire and snow; trees, flowers and cities. And in every case he has made them peculiarly intimate. With his art, as with his love, to be most ours he has only to be himself.

To-day it feels to me almost an impertinence to quote examples from many poems which have become part of our poetic consciousness. I suppose that the anthologies have made such perfect things as *Nightingales, A Passer-by* and the ode *On a Dead Child* almost popular; but at this time of day it may surprise many people to learn that these poems, which first appeared in smaller type than their

fellows from the exigencies of line-length, were once considered a grave abuse of poetic licence. And this is all the more remarkable because, as is usually the case, complexity and originality of theme are nearly always associated in Bridges with the highest mastery of treatment. The full emancipation of his technique first showed itself in these "stress-prosody" poems. To us it must seem amazing that even the academic (and to-day we are told that Bridges is one of them) should have missed the charm and strength of a poem like *London Snow;* and I imagine that its rhythmic subtlety was the greatest bar to its being understood. Other things being equal, an obvious rhythm, freely repeated, unvaried by nuance or delay, always has the advantage over rhythmical subtlety in this country. Even Tennyson had to atone for the freedom of Maud by six volumes of Arthurian confectionery. In the last two hundred years music has meant very little to us as a nation, and this perhaps explains the popular lack of ear. But, rhythm apart, surely the subject of *London Snow* has its echo in the consciousness of five million people, that wonder of loveliness that blooms in a night to make every man a child and every city a fairyland. Here it bloomed incomparably :—

. . . and when full inches seven
It lay in the depth of its uncompacted lightness
The clouds blew off from a high and frosty heaven.

A high and frosty heaven . . . such a lightened crystal brightened sky as we have all known, and beneath it the voices of children calling, their shrillness half muffled. *London Snow* should have been written in an accentual jingle, such as Swinburne's worst, and thus lubricated the critics would have swallowed the lines regardless of their length.

With flowers Bridges is always happy, even in his conceits. There is a marvellously pretty flower song in *Achilles;* another in *Palicio.* Margaret speaks:

This herb I think
Grows where the Greek hath been. Its beauty shows
A subtle and full knowledge, and betrays
A Genius of contrivance. See'st thou how
The fading emerald and azure blent
On the white petals are enmeshed about
With delicate sprigs of green? 'Tis therefore called
Love in a mist.

PALICIO. Who is the thistle here?

MARGARET.

O, he, with plumèd crest, springing all armed
In steely lustre, and erect as Mars,
That is the Roman.

PALICIO. Find the Saracen.

MARGARET.

This hot gladiolus, with waving swords
And crying colour.

This passage is a piece of delicate and lovely fancy. As a contrast to it I would place the *Sea Poppy*, quoted in the next section as the text of a distinction.

Of his bird-worship there are examples beyond number: *Larks*, *Full-throated Robin*, *Last week in February* and many others. And this is inevitable, for bird-life enters so markedly into the landscape of Southern England that the tenderness of their song is almost a part of the atmosphere. But one point seems to me significant, and this applies also to his ships: these beautiful winged things are made to bear the only conscious symbolism that enters into his writing. The splendid sonnet in *The Growth of Love* :—

I would be a bird, and straight on wings I arise—

with its fine upward sweep of winged words, is made to echo the emancipation of the spirit, and shows itself in an unexpected emancipation of the sonnet form. The great ode in *Prometheus* reflects a like ideal of spiritual freedom :—

Joy, the joy of flight.

And, in the same rapture, his soul goes adventuring upon the decks of *A Passer-by* :—

Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,

That fearest nor sea rising, nor sky clouding,
  Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest ?
  Ah ! soon, when Winter has all our vales opprest,
When skies are cold and misty, and hail is hurling,
  Wilt thou glide on the blue Pacific, or rest
In a summer haven asleep, thy white sails furling.

I there before thee, in the country that well thou knowest,
  Already arrived am inhaling the odorous air :
I watch thee enter unerringly where thou goest,
  And anchor queen of the strange shipping there,
  Thy sails for awnings spread, thy masts bare ;
Nor is aught from the foaming reef to the snow-capped
    grandest
  Peak, that is over the feathery palms more fair
Than thou, so upright, so stately, and still thou standest.

And yet, O splendid ship, unhailed and nameless,
  I know not if, aiming a fancy, I rightly divine
That thou hast a purpose joyful, a courage blameless,
  Thy port assured in a happier land than mine.
  But for all I have given thee, beauty enough is thine,
As thou, aslant with trim tackle and shrouding,
  From the proud nostril curve of a prow's line
In the offing scatterest foam, thy white sails crowding.

. . . . .

A certain number of poems in all five books, and particularly in the first, are formal in the sense that both in matter and treatment they derive from earlier models ; and these, though they are marvellously well imitated and contrive to capture not only the form but the

atmosphere of the originals, are his least considerable work. I have already hinted at what I believe to be the explanation of this return to the past: his fine discontent with a mode of expression degraded into commonplace by contemporary use. Even then you will notice that he does not adopt the pot-pourri formalism of the early Victorians such as Hood, or the turgid Byron-Moore lyrical convention which preceded it. In his discontent with the vulgarity of contemporary forms, which represented, in fact, the lees of the great Romantics, he turned instinctively towards the more generous Elizabethan vintage, a wine of lineage. Once, indeed, he essays the withered rose formula :—

> Poor withered rose and dry,
> Skeleton of a rose
> Risen to testify
> To love's sad close.

And one can say no more than that the specialists in this sort of sentiment could not have bettered it.

Usually the individual note is too strong to suffer easily the bonds of so fragile a technique, and one is conscious of the restraint. Most of these pieces are love-poems. In spirit they correspond with the stiffness and self-consciousness of the first *Growth of Love* sonnets, and I

suspect that they belong to the same period of writing. It is almost as though the poet's haughty disdain of emotion made him choose this means for the suppression of feelings too tempestuous to be trusted to a freer form. It certainly does act as a curb to the tingling passion of things like " I will not let thee go " in the first book. It half veils the joy of " I made another song in likeness of my love," or the mild ecstasy of " I have loved flowers that fade." In some of the poems in the second book, such as the opening dialogue between Poet and Muse : " Will Love again awake that lies asleep so long ? " I cannot feel that the choice is so deliberate. Their formulæ read like the remains of a habit ; for here conventional verse is mingled in a bewildering way with intense and untrammelled expression such as :—

> Her beauty would surprise
> Gazers on Autumn eves,
> Who watched the broad moon rise
> Upon the scattered sheaves.

Contrast this stanza with its neighbour :—

> And yet her smiles have danced
> In vain, if her discourse
> Win not the soul entranced
> In divine intercourse.

And in the third poem of the same book, his

exquisite *Late Spring Evening*, the third stanza is marred by the same kind of intrusion.

In another kind of poem these echoes of formalism are less destructive of reality; I mean those which he himself calls elegies, and many others, not so labelled, which are really elegiac in character. I suppose the contemplative indolence of Gray's poem has really fixed the atmosphere of this genre; but in these works Bridges is sometimes nearer to the Milton of Lycidas, and at others to those elegies of Shenstone, to which even the comprehensive Augustan taste hardly did justice, than to Gray. It is a mood which, drooping with physical languor and smooth with languor of the mind, suggests that the poet is so drowsily comfortable that he can afford to indulge in sombreness. With Bridges it often produces a suggestion of Vergil;—as in "There is a hill beside the silver Thames":—

> Sometimes an angler comes, and drops his hook
> Within its hidden depths, and 'gainst a tree
> Leaning his rod, reads in some pleasant book,
> Forgetting soon his pride of fishery;
> And dreams, or falls asleep,
> While curious fishes peep
> About his nibbled bait, or scornfully
> Dart off and rise and leap.

We find the same quality in the *Elegy among the Tombs*, in the lovely *Indolence*, in the

Miltonic *Elegy on a Lady*, with its more than Miltonic ending :—

> And thou, O lover, that art on the watch,
> Where, on the banks of the forgetful streams,
> The pale indifferent ghosts wander, and snatch
> The sweeter moments of their broken dreams,—
> Thou, when the torchlight gleams,
> When thou shalt see the slow procession,
> And when thine ears the fitful music catch,
> Rejoice, for thou art near to thy possession.

If we except these lyrics, a little stifled as it were by the weight of old models, but lovely none the less, and with them a small number of occasional pieces, quick-witted, but undeniably slight, we are left with a great number of nature-idylls of the type which he has so completely made his own, and a dozen or more of love-poems as sweetly dignified as the best of *The Growth of Love* sonnets, and infinitely more flexible. It is this mingling of flexibility with strength, of sanity with sweetness and of lofty idealism with naturalness of expression, which makes the love-poetry of the *Shorter Poems* unique of its kind. The Platonic candour remains, but the mode has ceased wholly to be conventional; the conceits are gone; the decoration is no longer there for decoration's sake; and to these there is added a virility which was never there before. I

know of no lovelier hymn of love's content than the exalted "Love on my heart from heaven fell"; no ampler expression of love's religion than "Since thou, O fondest and truest"; no nobler song of parting than the magnificent "O thou unfaithful, still as ever dearest"; no sublimation of spiritual love so lofty as "My spirit kisseth thine," with the amazing simile at the end, which takes its place alone among the loveliest of the Idylls :—

My spirit kisseth thine,
My spirit embraceth thee :
I feel thy being twine
Her graces over me,

In the life-kindling fold
Of God's breath ; where on high,
In furthest space untold
Like a lost world I lie :

And o'er my dreaming plains
Lightens, most pale and fair,
A moon that never wanes ;
Or more, if I compare,

Like what the shepherd sees
On late mid-winter dawns,
When thro' the branchèd trees
O'er the white-frosted lawns,

The huge unclouded sun,
Surprising the world whist,
Is all uprisen thereon,
Golden with melting mist.

Even when he descends from these higher levels of passion to the smaller and more trivial incidents in the history of love, he is no less happy. There is a kind of poem not uncommon in the later books of the *Shorter Poems*, and also in the *New Poems*, which is domestic in tone. They are poems that dwell on small things remembered; little altars dedicated to that wedded love of which I think one might call him, more justly than Patmore, the highest celebrant. Particularly lovely in its flavour of Spring is the slight "So sweet love seemed that April morn"; and of the same sort are "My delight and thy delight," "I climb the mossy bank of the glade," and others. They are not among the most wonderful of his achievements, but they are the best things of the kind ever written.

Of his relation to Nature the next chapter will speak more fully; but the greater number of these *Shorter Poems*, love lyrics, elegies and the rest, are really no more than occasional celebrations of that characteristic emotion, half-way to ecstasy, which he calls joy. The word is always with us in a hundred lovely liveries: "Joy, sweetest lifeborn joy"; "heavenly Joy"; "Joys whose earthly names were never known"; "In all things the essential Joy"; beauty, which is "Joy's

ladder, reaching from home to home"; "my special Joy."

The essence of this joy, "upon the formless moments of our being flitting," is so simple that it is hard to capture. Those moments when "life and joy are one" seldom declare themselves here in sudden, dizzy upspringings of the imagination, fountains of light that leave us dazzled or blinded; but they do illumine nearly every one of his poems with a mild radiance, so that the whole range of this man's work is like nothing so much as a sunny English landscape. "*Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate.*"

I suppose it is because we are used in our poetry to the tropical kind of imagination which carries us swiftly beyond the temperate regions of ordinary experience, that so many have overlooked this tender warmth in the work of Bridges, and have even called him cold. At its highest reach the thin flame is almost colourless, the finest emanation of the spirit "leaping live and laughing higher" that seems paler still when it is compared with those bonfires of stale passion and violent emotions, staining the sky red, which have sooted so much of our poetry. It is this fifth

essence of Joy which flickers out in the great ode at the end of his *Prometheus* :—

> My soul is drunk with joy, her new desire
> In far forbidden places wanders away.
> Her hopes with free bright-coloured wings of fire
> Upon the gloom of thought
> Are sailing out.

And then, as the still flame, burning, steadies itself :—

> O my vague desires !
> Ye lambent flames of the soul, her offspring fires :
> That are my soul herself in pangs sublime
> Rising and flying to heaven before her time. . . .

Here we have poetry that is almost akin to music in the fusion of thought with expression ; it seems almost to have slipped the bonds of the spoken word. It is all free and splendid : " Joy, the joy of flight." It is in passages like this—and they are rare—that the Bridges ecstasy most nearly approaches to that of the great mystics : the Wordsworth of the Lines Written above Tintern Abbey finding " that serene and blessed mood in which we are laid asleep in body and become a living soul," when, with the " deep power of joy " we see into the life of things. Yet even here there is a distinction ; for the ecstasy of Bridges is not nearly as remote or impersonal as that of the mystics ; it is more homely, more universal ;

and that is why it is easily communicable to those who approach his work with love, so that they can taste it without wonder or enviousness. In effect, while the joy of most poetry resolves itself into a Promethean attempt to transcend the beauties of life, the joy of Bridges is seldom more than part of the common joy of being alive. "For once born," he says in *Wintry Delights:*

> whatever 'tis worth, LIFE is to be held to.
> Its mere persistence esteem'd as real attainment, . . .
> And 'twere worth the living, howe'er unkindly bereft of
> *Those joys and comforts, thro' which we chiefly regard it.*

He accepts life cheerfully, not as a stain, however brilliant, upon the white radiance of eternity, but as the one attainment of which we are complete masters. It has been the habit of poets to fret at their chains, and it has taken a good deal of pseudo-mysticism to reconcile them to the limitations of this weary planet. It is characteristic of Bridges' spiritual courage that he wears them without complaint, grasping with a zest as passionate almost as Whitman's at the supreme moments. Spiritually he might well have been the author of that song of parting, "Joy, shipmate, joy."

It is not difficult to analyse the sources of

this emotion. Naturally it beats with a quickened pulse in the rather subdued pages of *The Growth of Love*, though here he writes for the most part of its transitoriness :—

> Ah, heavenly joy ! But who hath ever heard,
> Who hath seen joy, or who shall ever find
> Joy's language ? There is neither speech nor word ;
> Nought but itself to teach it to mankind.

And in the *Shorter Poems* he finds everywhere joy less elusive. He finds it in the simplest of beauties. No poet but Wordsworth has so contented himself with the common flowers ; for him they hold " A joy of love at sight." " The very names of things beloved are dear," he says somewhere in the sonnets, and so he enshrines in the tale of remembered joys his lovely catalogue of " the idle flowers." It is as though every new joy added to his hoarded delights will in some way enrich or amplify his spiritual dignity, and make life more worth the living. Nor does the joy fade with the flower ; for when he lingers upon these exquisite names,

> 'tis winter, child,
> And bitter north winds blow,
> The ways are wet and wild,
> The land is laid in snow.

In the same secretive spirit he has builded, " out of his treasure house," a melody of " all

fair sounds that I love, remembered together in one."

> And I knew not whether
> From waves of rustling wheat it was,
> Recoveringly that pass :
> Or a hum of bees in the queenly robes of the lime :
> Or a descant in pairing time
> Of warbling birds : or watery bells
> Of rivulets in the hills.

Indeed, it would seem that much of his joy is retrospective; a joy in idleness, a sweet contemplation of garnered riches which brings a gentle flush of pleasure to the conscious mind. Life is overwhelming in its wealth of this " simple enjoyment, calm in its excess,"

> And every eve I say,
> Noting my step in bliss,
> That I have known no day
> In all my life like this.

And I think this conception of joy as an inalienable possession (echoed again with Margaret's cry in *Palicio*—" Oh, joy, joy, joy, This beauteous world is mine, All Sicily mine, This morning mine ") is partly the secret of the love which these poems inspire. They imply so much that is gallant and courageous, such a splendid steadfastness in the worship of beauty, that the reading of them is a reproach to those of us who have the dust of

experience in our eyes. I do not think any poet in our literature has been so determined in his purpose of "seeking the face of beauty without blame"; he has sought it with something of the religious fervour which we have seen informing the sonnets of *The Growth of Love;* and his reward is joy.

IV

FRESHNESS OF VISION

THE poetry of Bridges is not so much a return to nature as a return to naturalness. The tradition of the Romantic School made fields and trees and hills the proper material for poetic treatment as definitely as they banished groves, nymphs and temples; so that even the latest breath of the great Victorian era was drawn in the open air. But the devotion to nature had become more reflective, and a trifle indolent. One does not imagine that the sounding cataract haunted Lord Tennyson like a passion. But the downward smoke of those lazy streams in the land of the Lotus-Eaters is very pretty and natural; none of the Augustans could have done it,—except Pope, who could do anything. Indeed, Tennyson's very common touches of natural description are a first suggestion of the method which Bridges represents. The Romantics wooed nature passionately, as though their very fervour could force her secret from her. And there are moments when it seems as if the

secret is on the verge of being told. In the work of Bridges nature is still being wooed, but critically. Only here and there does he forgo his detachment to give us such ardent tones as this :—

> And when I saw her, then I worshipped her,
> And said,—O bounteous Spring, O beauteous Spring,
> Mother of all my years, thou who dost stir
> My heart to adore thee and my tongue to sing,
> Flower of my fruit, of my heart's blood the fire,
> Of all my satisfaction the desire !
>
> How art thou every year more beautiful . . .

or this :—

> For who so well hath wooed the maiden hours
> As quite to have won the worth of their rich show,
> To rob the night of mystery, or the flowers
> Of their sweet delicacy ere they go ? . . .

Perhaps it is an adventure which is not lightly to be made in verse. It means either complete failure, or something that is only the shadow of success. Coleridge tried it, as if casually, and succeeded more often than he failed. Francis Thompson tried it, passionately, and failed more often than he succeeded. Possibly it is dangerous, this tracking of the "nude unutterable thought." Bridges rarely attempts to pierce to the mysterious heart of things. His genius is reflective rather than intuitive. His first concern is with beauty—

not the beauty of form and movement only, but of the ideas and states of mind to which they give birth. When he has given us this he is content. He does not try to unveil the mystery of terror which is always to some extent present in the pathos we find in anything beautiful. He is happy to show us Nature in her robe of beauty and joy, without those sudden intuitions

> such as dodge
> Conception to the very bourne of heaven.

Nobody has given us a satisfactory account of ecstasy in literature. Arthur Machen has snared the shadow of one in a very pleasantly written essay, and makes it, not quite justifiably, the ultimate test of great writing. But at best one can only say that this author has it, the other has not, and the solution of the acrostic has yet to be found. Thus it is in Smollett, but not in Fielding; in Shenstone, but not in Pope; in Dickens, but not in Thackeray; in Francis Thompson, but not in Robert Bridges. Small men have caught it where great men have missed it. It is not to be found merely in this sentence or in that; it is a hidden flame which may set a whole book flickering with strange meanings. Again, it may be concentrated in a single phrase. I have already suggested that it is the result of

a reconciliation between things that are in thought very distant or opposed, or perhaps a blending of rays that lie generally beyond the imaginative spectrum. But comparisons of this kind cannot do more than hint where it lies.

The fact remains that this ecstasy, or whatever we choose to call it, is in all English writers unmistakably present or unmistakably absent. Although we cannot define it, it draws a definite line across the whole field of English literature. The distinctions which are commonly made are usually aspects of the same difference. The opposed schools of classic and romantic poets, of mystic and non-mystic poets, of intuitive and reflective poets, of mad and sane poets, are separated by the same line in different parts of its length. Of the first of these distinctions, which was moreover the first to be generally recognized, a footnote to the *Essay on Milton's Prosody* gives this excellent account :—

> To put the matter in the simplest diagrammatic form, every work of art is a combination of *nature* and *imagination*. If it were all nature it would not be art ; if it were all imagination it would be unintelligible,—and this last because art is man's creation, and man is a part of nature. We may, therefore, roughly figure any work of art as being

compounded of fifty parts imagination and fifty nature, or ten of one and ninety of the other, and so on : and (supposing equal intellectual excellence and æsthetic beauty) the best of two works of art would be the one which had most imagination and least nature. Classical art is that which, like the most characteristic Greek work, fixes certain natural limits, and does not transgress them. It is poised at a certain imaginative height within touch of common life, and it does not deviate very far either above or below this constant elevation. Romantic art refuses these " reasonable " limits, and leaving the imagination free to transcend them, is in danger of losing touch with nature. Thence it follows that in romantic art (where the percentage, so to speak, of the natural may be reduced to a very small proportion) it becomes necessary for the natural to be reinforced, and this can only be done by realism far stronger than classical art would bear ; which, not being at so great a height, is more easily degraded and brought down ; and thus realism becomes the companion of imagination. This, I believe, gives a true and intelligible account of one of the main distinctions between classical and romantic as we use those ill-defined terms.

This is, at any rate, an excellent account of Bridges' own poetic method. It might also be used to justify the method of a more recent school of poets who—for reasons which I am totally at a loss to guess—are sometimes described as Bridges' disciples. It fixes the place of realism in literature as a means of

weighting a too exuberant imagination so that it shall not drift too far from the earth. But realism is no more the proper sphere of poetry than sandbags are the motive power of a balloon. One can only guess how far Bridges has deliberately moored his craft in mid-air. It may be this very limitation of method which has prevented him from reaching the imaginative heights of those who are called the metaphysical poets. I suspect that the rarity of imaginative phrases in his work is one of the results.

One notices this limitation of method all through the *Shorter Poems*, and perhaps it helps that impression of sincerity which is one of their special charms. It shows itself in the sane directness of his outlook. Here, as elsewhere, he allows natural beauty to express itself. He gives us none of the false currency of fine phrases. When he personifies nature or any of the things of nature, it is more often by deliberate comparison than by any imaginative fusion of idea. This manner of keeping nature and imagination apart and as it were parallel to one another, results sometimes in a rather exquisite quality which is rare in English verse,—something at once naïve and restrained, severe yet passionate, a certain grave ecstasy. We see it in the *Sea Poppy*

lyric, where one might almost mark off definitely the lines which are "nature" and those which are "imagination." First the flower is pictured with exquisite accuracy and charm; then, with an almost Vergilian tenderness, we are given the image which it suggests; then in the last couplet we are brought back to the little yellow poppy, shaking on the edge of the waves,—with almost a hint of apology for the imaginative flight which the poet has taken us. He writes of the sea again in a curiously effective stanza:—

> The sea keeps not the Sabbath day,
> His waves come rolling evermore;
> His noisy toil grindeth the shore,
> And all the cliff is drencht with spray.

The touch of imagination just escapes the ridiculous; but it lends more effect to the simple description that follows than the most imaginative piece of invocation could have done. We are not told that the ocean is a "dim leviathan," or even a "sulky grey old brute," but merely that he does not keep the Sabbath day. And notice that one suggestion is not allowed to lead to another willy-nilly; the word "toil" fixes the image rather than extends it.

This is only to say that Bridges is not a mystic poet, a metaphysical poet, or a romantic

poet. He does not transfuse the shows of nature in a white heat of imagination. Of Matthew Arnold's four modes of dealing with nature—the conventional, the faithful, the Greek and the magical—the last has been the birthright of our greatest poets. It is not the method of Bridges. Time after time nature in one or other of her aspects has been rapt into a metaphor or pressed into the service of some flaming mystery. But it is surprising how rarely the earth has been described simply and faithfully for the sake of its intrinsic beauty.

Coleridge, who of all poets comes nearest to uniting both methods, could write, in lines which are almost faint with their own beauty, of that dell which

> Bathed by the mist is fresh and delicate
> As vernal cornfield, or the unripe flax
> When, through its half-transparent stalks at eve
> The level sunshine glimmers with green light.

The simile, in spite of its exquisite actuality, lifts the dell beyond the reach of common sight; it has become visionary by some hidden magic; it is a valley in fairyland. In a slightly reminiscent passage, Bridges describes his vision of the virgin Spring "walking the sprinkled meadows at sundown":—

Her dress was greener than the tenderest leaf
That trembled in the sunset glare aglow:
Herself more delicate than is the brief
Pink apple-blossom, that May showers lay low,
And more delicious than's the earliest streak
The blushing rose shows of her crimson cheek.

Here, with a similar image and almost equal beauty of expression, the effect seems to me to be practically inverted. Imagination is poised above the beauty of the vision, defining it, rather than below, indicating and suggesting. With Bridges imagination is a milder, perhaps more constant radiance, thrown across a landscape and calling from it a curiously responsive glow of luminous detail.

And yet, by a strange contradiction, he is the author of some of the most exquisite imaginative phrases in the language. Never very common, they are most found, I think, in his later work; and generally they are very nearly perfect. Mr. Symons has noticed the magic with which this poet brings together alien words so that they seem as though they have been designed for one another from their infancy. But he has pointed out at the same time that the boldest of them do not surprise one. One reason for this, no doubt, is that they are so often inevitable that the imagination accepts them at once as perfectly fit and natural. Bridges has the courage of all great

artists in disdaining all but the essential and inclusive epithet. But here again it seems to me that his finest phrases, however imaginative, are not suggestive of anything beyond their own beauty. Take, for instance, the wonderful picture of morning, when

> Uncanopied sleep is flying from field and tree,

or the

> dreamy butterflies
> Unpiloted in the sun,

or the palm-willow in winter where

> . . . The spring-goddess cowers in faint attire
> Of frightened fire.

Each of these lovely phrases is in one sense suggestive; it includes many ideas that are not actually expressed. But the suggestion extends only to what may serve to complete the picture. It does not leave us groping. Apart from the vocal beauty and subtle connection of words, these phrases are in essence a divine economy of language joined with most delicate imagining.

I have said that the phrases that have any claim to be really imaginative are few. But there are enough, if he had never written anything else, to place him with the greatest of phrase-makers. I know of few things

more beautiful than this picture of the hive-bees in the first classical epistle :—

> The yellow honey-makers
> Whose images from of old have haunted poetry, settling
> On the blossoms of man's dream-garden as on the summer flowers.

Another superb imaginative flash gives us Cupid's "soft unchristened smile." Here is another, in the picture of a November landscape, when the night deepens

> with Winter to starve grass and tree,
> And soon to bury in snow
> The Earth, that, sleeping 'neath her frozen stole,
> Shall dream a dream crept from the sunless pole
> Of how her end shall be.

But even in the less ambitious of the *Shorter Poems* we find the homely magic of Bridges' imagination. And there is a sense in which, in the full chorus of our lyric poetry, one hears no voice so peculiarly English. If the poet has caught for us any whisper which no writer before him has been able to snare, it is less an impalpable undertone of the earth than a very clear note of native song. Shelley's verse bears a wild-orchis fragrance; Keats the perfume of "a musk-rose blowing in a green island, far from all men's knowing"; Wordsworth's the essence of mountain loneliness

and of wide spaces. The lyrics of Robert Bridges are fresh with the scent of the English country-side. They are the voice of a green and pleasant land. They march with the season and all the misty changes of English weather. We have no verse since Shakespeare's that smells so of the meadows. And there is something in the nature-poems which is as new as it seems natural and inevitable.

Riding adown the country lanes . . .

he begins one of his later poems. The verses are of no special merit, but the opening is so characteristic that there is no poet before Bridges in whose work one would meet it without a little thrill of surprise and pleasure. This homely lilt with its suggestion of true delight in the simple things of outdoor life in England is hardly to be matched. Such phrases as "Spring goeth all in white," "Gay marigold is frolic," "The green corn waving in the dale," have something of the quiet ecstasy of "When daffodils begin to peer." Bridges is one of the few poets who have dared to take the lanes and meadows for granted without craving to say something fine about them.

Whitman, sniffing the prairie smell beyond the Missouri, vowed to praise nothing in art or aught else that had not absorbed the breath

of the plains and could give it out again. It has taken English poetry five hundred years to absorb England. Shakespeare's " native wood-notes wild " are only, as it were, accidentals in the march of his music. Even Wordsworth missed the delicate bloom of the English atmosphere. One after another the " major " poets have been preoccupied with the music of the spheres and have had no ear for the piercingly sweet melodies of the English country-side. Others have frankly despised it in comparison with exotic effects. One must look back to smaller men, half forgotten in the study and unknown in the street, for the intermittent snatches of this sense of England, —to the serious and indolent Thomson, and to Shenstone, poor poet and inspired gardener.

It is easy to confuse the genius of a poet with the genius of his work. The *Shorter Poems* are very nearly the most English thing in our language; and this simply because Bridges has dared to be plainly pictorial, not complicating his effects with a mixture of morality or imaginative suggestion. They are not a series of illustrated thoughts, but of pictures defined and enriched by imagination. No other poet has treated so lovingly or minutely of the thousand shifting elements of English landscape. Here is a man who dis-

tinguishes in verse the tones of winter skies, June skies, October skies, rainy skies, skies that hold snow; the shapes of clouds, cloud-shadows; blue distances and grey distances; valley mists and river mists, and all the drifting, changing aspects of island weather. The nature-lyrics might be arranged into a song-cycle of English seasons which would never have been surpassed for faithfulness and charm. He presents England directly as England presents itself: in open highlands and open lowlands, with a wealth of delicate but not obscure detail.

This is one of the new paths that Bridges has opened to us. The English genius is, in the main, intuitive, and I have suggested that the genius of Bridges, in so far as it is reflective, becomes remote from the national stamp. In this respect, if the distinction is to be made, he is, possibly, less English than the rest. Yet English nature-poetry, from Chaucer to Tennyson, has given us much that is exotic in colour and suggestion with little that is really nature. It has not been the normal method of our poets to subdue their vision to the pale tones of an English landscape. Whether we refer it to the racial love of wandering or to some warm Iberian strain in our blood, the tendency is not to be overlooked.

Keats' longing for a beaker full of the warm south colours all his natural description, which is the most imaginative and least actual in the language. "Nature was related to him," in Bridges' own phrase, "as an enchantress to a dreamer." He found less enchantment in the earth itself than in the dreams with which he embroidered it. Shelley, with more delicate apprehension of colour and movement, brings the same transfusing warmth of imagination. In Wordsworth himself a quiet rural England inspired little but moral sentiments. His brain was haunted by mountains and cataracts, and he passed by the trim beauty of the country-side. The vision of England has been always with us, but it has been too cold to supply its own inspiration. When the fairies were banished from the land, her woods and rivers had to be peopled with legions of nymphs and hamadryads. The ecstatic glimpses of England in Comus and L'Allegro, the green hillocks, the hedgerow elms, the "meadows trim with daisies pied," are not complete till Corydon and Thyrsis strut on between the oaks. Pope—a true lover of nature, as I suspect were many of his maligned contemporaries—made of the Thames valley a great garden.

Bridges declares boldly that meadows, rivers, trees, woods and the commonplaces of nature

are their own justification. They are the accepted material of his verse. He handles them fearlessly in all their half-tints and subtle variations.

These pictures of England are not easily to be forgotten. They give a freshness to the little volume of Bridges' which one finds in only a few books; such are "The Shropshire Lad" and "Leaves of Grass." To those who recognize this open-air fragrance as one of the rarest and most exquisite things in literature the *Shorter Poems* will be one of the dear and intimate books that we admit to the inner circle of literary delights. The incomparable landscape of the "North Wind in October"; the April lyric that begins "Wanton with long delay," the merry picture of a windmill; the vision of the oak tree falling in the silence of a copse; the magic flame of the palm willow in early spring; these and a score of other Idylls, little pictures, haunt the mind with the fragrance of actual memories of some chance aspect of beauty, realized in an exalted moment. The colours remain wonderfully bright with the flush of their original inspiration. The scenes are picked out against the wide background of a land which the poet assumes instinctively that we know and love. This confidence is part of the charm; there

is a sense of actual locality and surroundings which must almost be shared, an open secret between poet and reader, before the poems, with all their simplicity, find their proper frame in the mind's eye. In the first book of the *Shorter Poems*, there is an impression of the time, when a gale, after blowing all night, drops, in the morning, suddenly—" the hour," as Bridges puts it with characteristic precision —" the wind has ceased to blow." This song of a morning when

> The horses of the strong south-west
> Are pastured round his tropic tent,

is in itself complete and very beautiful. But it has, I think, another characteristic which pervades the *Shorter Poems*, and indeed all Bridges' work, with a special charm. There is a sense not only of the momentary local harmonies of movement and colour, which a dozen poets might have given us equally well, but of the strong bass of the surrounding country, sea and land. The soft inland touch in the third stanza, the " rock and tower and tree " whither the frightened birds had fled to house, defines subtly the whole atmosphere of a coast district in South England on a day of serried cumulus cloud. Then the magnificent sweep of the last stanzas carries us with the

clouds above meadow and down, " sheer off the cliff upon the sea," and away over the dancing Channel where they

> piling all the south with light
> Dapple in France the fertile plains.

The poem is no longer of a day of the north-wester where Sussex meets the sea; its delicate motion has swept an incredibly wide landscape before the tiny lens of the verse.

Such an impression—that the minute and often concentrated description of nature in the poems is really the nucleus of a vast circle of suggested landscape—meets us in many poems where it depends upon devices far less apparent than in that I have just quoted. It is irresistible in the picture of the sea-poppy in the first book—its lyric simplicity will perhaps make it immortal—where the seeing eye glimpses a whole stretch of fertile hinterland backing its ragged strip of sand. It is present in such unforgettable fragments as " The evening darkens over " in the third book, or " The upper skies are palest blue " and " The clouds have left the sky " in the fourth, as strongly as in the more elaborate scenic effects. It is because of this that he who reads only the opening stanzas of *Indolence* in Book Three must feel that he has been a long journey

" between the happy shires," and drunk deeply of the sweet air of the Thames valley. " There is a hill beside the silver Thames," begins another poem in the same book, which holds again a continuous sense of surrounding country, a note of what Jefferies called the " exquisite undertone " of the earth in summer —" that which just trembles at the extreme edge of hearing." We meet it—by the Thames again—in the beautiful last stanzas of *The Voice of Nature* :—

But far away I think, in the Thames valley,
The silent river glides by flowery banks :
And birds sing sweetly in branches that arch an alley
Of cloistered trees, moss grown in their ancient ranks,
Where if a light air stray
'Tis laden with hum of bees and scent of may.
Love and peace be thine, O spirit, for ever :
Serve thy sweet desire : despise endeavour.

And if it were only for thee, entrancèd river,
That scarce dost rock the lily on her airy stem,
Or stir a wave to murmur, or a rush to quiver ;
Wer't but for the woods, and summer asleep in them :
For you my bowers green,
My hedges of rose and woodbine, with walks between,
Then well could I read wisdom in every feature,
O well should I understand the voice of Nature.

V

LANDSCAPE

It is this sense of landscape, to which I referred as an explanation of Bridges' appealing "Englishism," that will be, I think, his special claim to immortality. His classicism, his sense of joy and beauty, his love of earth, his freshness of vision, are not in themselves enough to assure him more than minor fame. The last would rank him with a select band, of whom, while the greatest is Shakespeare, the least are in popular estimation very small poets indeed. It is from a fusion of his imaginative temper with an unequalled insight into natural beauty that there emerges this crowning distinction.

Literature is a kingdom where battles are fought more often on means than on principles. As far as I am aware, nobody has challenged Bridges' artistic right to his almost startlingly novel method of approaching nature. One would be surprised to find him made the subject of such sweeping polemics as these :—

Now there is but one grand style in the treatment of all subjects whatsoever, and that style is based on the perfect knowledge, and consists in the simple unencumbered rendering of the specific characters of the given object—be it man, beast, or flower. Every change, caricature or abandonment of such specific character is as destructive of grandeur as it is of truth, of beauty as of propriety. Every alteration of the features of nature has its origin either in powerless indolence or blind audacity; in the folly which forgets, or the indolence which desecrates, works which it is the pride of angels to know and their privilege to love.

Yet these words are as applicable as a defence and explanation of the bulk of Bridges' works as of the English landscape artists to whom "their sincere admirer" dedicated Modern Painters. Indeed, Ruskin's views would serve not only on general grounds, but in fullest detail, as an ἀπολογία for a good deal that is novel in the method of the *Shorter Poems*. One questions whether the author of such lines as I will quote stands to be judged by literary or by pictorial canons.

In patient russet is his forest spread,
All bright with bramble red,
With beechen moss
And holly sheen: the oak silver and stark
Sunneth his aged bark
And wrinkled boss.

Or

> Of airy fans the delicate throng—
> Torn and scattered around :
> Far out afield they lie,
> In the watery furrows die,
> In grassy pools of the flood they sink and drown,
> Green-golden, orange, vermilion, golden and brown,
> The high year's flaunting crown
> Shattered and trampled down.

Though the whole problem which exercised Ruskin and his critics is to a certain extent self-resolved when applied to the poetic art, the philosophic distinction is as inevitable as ever. Half a century has shown us the result of that struggle, and I am not concerned to carry through the comparison further than to place Bridges in the spiritual category of the English landscape painters.

We need only consider the extraordinary grasp of detail and nicety of selection that go to the composition of his "landscape." Though it is within the limits of pure description that he develops his genius as a poet of landscape, it is in the perfectness of the description that we find his greatness as an inspired poet. Here is none of the transforming imagination that set rolling the heavy periods of Mr. Ruskin. The heaven-sent phrase is rare ; the obvious epithet, or at least an epithet of superficial character, is generally chosen.

Often it is a colour epithet. In addition to "dewy eves," "scented hay," "dewy lawns," "straight trunks," "warbling birds," "leafy trees," "cooing doves," "hot sun," "blossoming boughs of April," we hear much of "white clouds," "blue skies," "white sails," "green grass," "golden sun," "bowers green," and the like. When Keats tells us, picturing the Bacchic revellers in Endymion :—

> Like to a moving vintage down they came
> Crowned with green leaves and faces all on flame,

the simple adjective has a fragrance and a magic unsurpassed even in that mine of heaven-sent epithets. Imagination has taken a magnificent flight to circle back upon the obvious. In the fine picture of a day in late winter, Bridges writes :—

> A black rook stirs the branches here and there,
> Foraging to repair
> His broken home.

Here the common epithet has no such imaginative strength. It could have been applied almost equally well to the bare branches. It merely fixes for the rook his colour-value in the picture. In the same way the "green grass and leafy trees and snowy skies" do not, as a rule, carry any special suggestion. They are simply colour units to be disposed as

the spirit of the scene shall dictate. Assuming a keen actuality of imagination in the reader, the epithets could be left out and we should miss nothing. Behind their use there is a robust sense that they are among the diviner commonplaces that will not stale with repetition; they hint at an elevated sense of communion with nature in which the simplest properties of bird or flower begin to seem the most poetic.

In any case it is no part of Bridges' method in these poems of landscape to strive for special effect in this or that part of his picture. He has so severe an eye for the whole that nothing of minor importance must stand out beyond the rest. If he ventures upon detailed description of a flower—as in the poppy lyric—it is generally in the simplest terms of its superficial quality, "its attributes as an element of expression." It is one of the signs, I think, of the great poet that he is fearless in using the obvious epithet where it will serve a coherent picture, as it is of the small one that, in these very conditions, he abandons it to grope for the exalting phrase. True, the adjective is only a poetic tradition, a legacy of the Augustans, and—if it were not for the exalted sense of the obvious that I have mentioned—more severe art would banish the

common epithet altogether. But few poets have used it so freely or effectively as Bridges for the sake of its mosaic value in a complex scheme.

Indeed, in the finer efforts of landscape it tends to disappear. Here is an example, from the fifth Book, of this most simple and subtle art :—

NORTH WIND IN OCTOBER

In the golden glade the chestnuts are fallen all ;
From the sered boughs of the oak the acorns fall :
The beech scatters her ruddy fire ;
The lime hath stripped to the cold,
And standeth naked above her yellow attire :
The larch thinneth her spire
To lay the ways of the wood with cloth of gold.

Out of the golden-green and white
Of the brake the fir-trees stand upright
In the forest of flame, and wave aloft
To the blue of heaven their blue-green tuftings soft.

But swiftly in shuddering gloom the splendours fail,
As the harrying North-wind beareth
A cloud of skirmishing hail
The grievèd woodland to smite :
In a hurricane through the trees he teareth,
Raking the boughs and the leaves rending,
And whistleth to the descending
Blows of his icy flail.
Gold and snow he mixeth in spite,
And whirleth afar ; as away on his winnowing flight
He passeth, and all again for a while is bright.

The whole thing is very inelaborate. The first seven lines are a ground harmony in shades of golden brown, of which the first epithet strikes the prevailing tone. The chestnuts supply their warm red-brown, more by suggestion than as part of the picture, to lie with the honey-brown acorns; the hint of lemon-yellow borne by the word "lime" is reinforced by the pale gold of her "yellow attire"; and the larch repeats the prevailing tone with a scattering of her golden needles between the dark columns of the tree-trunks. These, already implied, are finely grouped by suggestion in "the ways of the wood."

The middle part of the poem brings a direct note of contrast with the first picture,—which, however, is still enforced with a firm and delicate iteration and a heightened brilliance by the phrases "golden-green and white" and "forest of flame,"—a vision of the blue-green fir-tops against the blue sky. Their swaying tranquillity leads to the hurrying change of the third picture, which spreads a sudden veil of grey and snow white. Then comes the bold mixing of gold and snow; then, at a breath, the storm passes, and the first picture shines out again. One could fill the space of this little poem many times over in pointing out all the exquisite touches it

holds. The perfectly adapted rhythmic motion of the last line, of line 15, and in the subtle changes of lines 10 and 11. The graduated effect of assonance, in the same lines, from the words "fir-trees," "forest," "flame," "aloft," "tuftings" and "soft"; the collision of final "s" and initial "s" in the last two words, exquisitely suggestive; the blustering "r's" in lines 16 and 17; the characteristic inversions in the same place; the pathetic echo of "fallen all"; the gently imaginative personification of the north wind, finely subdued to the seen effect of his movement; the amazingly skilful modulation of vowel sounds which gives such a rich succession of open notes in some fifty words of concentrated description. With this overwhelming compression of beautiful things I am not at the moment concerned; nor with the perfect descriptive justice of every epithet in the poem.

Consider only, apart from the technical and imaginative beauty, the careful composition and well-adapted movement of the poem. I think it is nearly flawless. In a method where grouping must be an effect of time instead of space; where colour is more a matter of infinitely careful suggestion than of realization; where light and shade depend on successive

vowel-tones which must each fall into their place in two or perhaps three other schemes of values, the result is sufficiently surprising. No poet before Bridges has deliberately set himself to attain in words the effects that belong really to the brush. And since the appeal of language falls more directly upon the imagination, the vision is correspondingly clear and exact. The grace of movement, too, enters with a delightful enhancement. I do not suggest that Bridges has developed a new art, or that the poet can ever invade the realm of the painter. Indeed, if achievements of this kind were not so common in Bridges' work, and had not all the appearance of deliberate mastery over a new method, one would regard it simply as a *tour de force*, an amazing double adventure in the arts. One has only to tamper with the poem, changing a word here and there, to realize its exquisite poise. The alteration of a single tone will fog the whole picture.

This method is so often repeated in the few pages—they are less than a hundred—of the *Shorter Poems*, that it is not to be considered as a casual inspiration. It reaches perfection in at least a score of poems. I will mention only, " Whither, O splendid ship," " I saw the Virgin-Mother," the third and fourth stanzas

of "There is a hill beside the silver Thames," all in the Second Book; "Indolence," in Book III; "Last week of February," "The pinks along my garden walks," "The storm is over," in Book IV; and "The garden in September," and "The Palm Willow," in Book V. They are all sustained examples of Bridges' supreme art of verse-landscape.

In spite of, or rather because of, this use of almost unexpressive phrases, one cannot help noticing the perfect consistency of atmosphere in a Bridges' picture. It is the power of drawing out the tone of some scene over the whole of a poem. Tennyson had something of the same faculty; I suspect that it is a matter of vowel-colour, of which the poet had such a masterly sense. The finest example of it is from the *New Poems*:—

NOVEMBER

The lonely season in lonely lands, when fled
Are half the birds, and mists lie low, and the sun
Is rarely seen, nor strayeth far from his bed;
The short days pass unwelcomed one by one.

Out by the ricks the mantled engine stands
Crestfallen, deserted,—for now all hands
Are told to the plough,—and ere it is dawn appear
The teams following and crossing far and near,
As hour by hour they broaden the brown bands
Of the striped fields; and behind them firk and prance
The heavy rooks, and daws grey-pated dance;

LANDSCAPE

As awhile, surmounting a crest, in sharp outline
(A miniature of toil, a gem's design,)
They are pictured, horses and men, or now near by
Above the lane they shout lifting the share,
By the trim hedgerow bloom'd with purple air ;
Where, under the thorns, dead leaves in huddle lie
Packed by the gales of Autumn, and in and out
The small wrens glide
With happy note of cheer,
And yellow amorets flutter above and about,
Gay, familiar in fear.

And now, if the night shall be cold, across the sky
Linnets and twites, in small flocks helter-skelter,
All the afternoon to the gardens fly,
From thistle-pastures hurrying to gain the shelter
Of American rhododendron or cherry-laurel :
And here and there, near chilly setting of sun,
In an isolated tree a congregation
Of starlings chatter and chide,
Thickset as summer leaves, in garrulous quarrel :
Suddenly they hush as one,—
The tree top springs,—
And off, with a whirr of wings,
They fly by the score
To the holly-thicket, and there with myriads more
Dispute for the roosts, and from the unseen nation
A babel of tongues, like running water unceasing,
Makes live the wood, the flocking cries increasing,
Wrangling discordantly, incessantly,
While falls the night on them self-occupied ;
The long dark night, that lengthens slow,
Deepening with Winter to starve grass and tree,
And soon to bury in snow
The Earth, that, sleeping 'neath her frozen stole
Shall dream a dream crept from the sunless pole
Of how her end shall be.

Here there is no line, from the fine opening to the supremely imaginative close, that is not tinged with the same pearl-grey atmosphere, as though not only the trim hedgerow but the whole scene took its colour from the air. This aspect of Bridges' genius is more noticeable perhaps in the *New Poems* than anywhere else, though in other respects they hardly reach the level of the earlier work. The first *Eclogue* is a lovely pageant of the months, a string of precious stones each gleaming with its delicate or fiery lustre. The two that best illustrate this subtle control of atmosphere are "July" :—

> Heavy is the green of the fields, heavy the trees
> With foliage hang, drowsy the hum of bees
> In the thund'rous air : the crowded scents lie low :
> Thro' tangle of weeds the river runneth slow.

And "October" :—

> On frosty morns with the woods aflame, down, down
> The golden spoils fall thick from the chestnut crown.
> May Autumn in tranquil glory her riches spend,
> With mellow apples her orchard-branches bend.

He is vigorous, too, in choosing precisely the most effective material for his pictures, down to the most casual points. In one of the poems we read that, at the approach of night

> The broad cloud-driving moon in the clear sky
> Lifts o'er the firs her shining shield.

From another poem I take :—

> And hark, on the ash-boughs ! Never did thrush sing
> Louder in praise of spring
> When spring is come.

In the next :—

> All day in the sweet box-tree the bee for pleasure hummeth;

I would point to the perfect instinct for the "essential superficial quality" in the choice of firs in the first poem, of an ash tree in the second, and a box tree in the third. In the last two instances it adds a touch of imaginative suggestion to its perfect pictorial aptness. In the same way the poet rarely fails in his choice of the essential epithet. Such pictures of flowers as these :—

> Nor more of heavy hyacinth now may drink,
> Nor spicy pink,
> Nor summer's rose, nor garnered lavender,
> But the few lingering scents
> Of streakèd pea, and gillyflower, and stocks
> Of courtly purple and aromatic phlox,—

and, within the same poem, "dreamy butterflies," "deepest-throated blooms," "idle effort," "ragged parliament," the "gentle flaws" of the western breeze are examples that can be paralleled at random throughout the *Shorter Poems*.

Another effect of Bridges' mosaic method,

in which all the parts are essential and none pre-eminent, is the unusual dignity that falls upon the common words of the language. It is a manner which curiously calls attention to words which have generally kept a minor place, or have been made the peg for a phrase or epithet. Even the simpler names of trees and flowers, and the more elementary words sky, grass, sea, and field, are sometimes strangely enhanced by this means. It seems as if a word which has once borne an important part in a colour scheme suggests harmonics in the tonal effect of a line, related here by assonance and here by rhyme to some other parts of the structure, and bearing a subtle share in the rhythmic scheme, will give out more purely its intrinsic colour and beauty. It is difficult to illustrate a point depending upon such fragile relations: perhaps the following lines will serve :—

> And at all times to hear are drowsy tones
> Of dizzy flies, and humming drones,
> With sudden flap of pigeon wings in the sky,
> Or the wild cry
> Of thirsty rooks that scour ascare
> The distant blue, to watering as they fare
> With creaking pinions. . . .

It is impossible to exaggerate the technical complexity of this later method. Nothing is

to be gained by dissecting all the devices that go to the making of its polyphony. There is none that is actually new in English verse, but no poet has lavished and combined them so confidently as Bridges. At times they are spun together with an almost incredible mastery; one would be dazzled by the jugglery of the technique if it were not always, or nearly always, subordinate to the form of the whole. There is hardly a poem, I think, in the five books of lyrics, that gives such an effect of severe form as *The Downs* :—

O bold majestic downs, smooth, fair and lonely ;
O still solitude, only matched in the skies ;
    Perilous in steep places,
    Soft in the level races,
Where sweeping in phantom silence the cloudland flies ;
With lovely undulation of fall and rise ;
    Entrenched with thickets thorned,
By delicate miniature dainty flowers adorned !

I climb your crown, and lo ! a sight surprising
Of sea in front uprising, steep and wide :
    And scattered ships ascending
    To heaven, lost in the blending
Of distant blues, where water and sky divide,
Urging their engines against wind and tide,
    And all so small and slow
They seem to be wearily pointing the way they would go.

The accumulated murmur of soft plashing,
Of waves on rocks dashing and searching the sands,
    Takes my ear, in the veering
    Baffled wind, as rearing

Upright at the cliff, to the gullies and rifts he stands ;
And his conquering surges scour out over the lands ;
While again at the foot of the downs
He masses his strength to recover the topmost crowns.

It is worth while, at the risk of being academic, to look at some of the subtleties that underlie the lovely flow of the poem. The rhythm, to begin with, is subtly fitted to the sense in every part. The sweep of the first line—which holds, by the way, in eleven syllables, every epithet necessary to the picture—is beautifully expressive of the noble skyline of the downs. In the second line the metre, as it were, turns back upon itself. Falling takes the place of rising stress, with a curious suggestion of drift and perspective, as though the motive power of the rhythm had been turned off, and the verse were carried on by the impetus of the first words, till the line fades in the open vowel of " skies." Among other effects that of heavily-laden stresses in the last line of the second stanza is the most obvious. Again the vowel tones generally take the colour of the picture. In the first line they are all grave ; the only stressed short vowel is in the word " majestic," which has a suggestive beauty of its own. In the second line, following the rhythmic change, they are quite distinct ; the stressed vowels—

apart from the internal rhyme—are all short or light. There is nothing to destroy the airy width of the picture till, with a change of focus as it were, we come to the word "thorned." The internal assonances, again, would make a long catalogue. Note for instance, "bold" and "lonely" combined with the effective rime of "only" in the next line; the long "e's" and "i's" in the first two lines of the second stanza; the "s's" in the first stanza; "t" in the seventh line; "e" in the sixth. Note again "flashing," "dashing," "searching," "sands,"—one of many instances of a kind of double assonance, where a string of words is associated by each holding one of two vowel and consonant combinations. Note "ear" and "veering" with its rime "rearing"; "cliff" and "rifts"; "ascending," "blending," "engines."

The whole texture of assonance throughout the poems is indeed so close that dissection seems an impertinence. It may be objected that many of them are unintentional,—chance relations to be found in all poetry, or for that matter in all prose. I should agree to the extent of suggesting that they are nearly all unintentional, or, if you will, inspired. The only standard which will decide how far they are worth noticing is their power of thrusting

themselves on our notice by the beauty of their effect. There are a host of commonly recurring devices which add incontestably to the consummate effect of the verse. We frequently find lurking in the poems, and quite unsystematized, the true *cynghanedd groes*, *cynghanedd lusg* and *cynghanedd sain* of the intricate texture of Welsh poetry. The structure of such lines as these, which would surprise us in another English poet, would not seem unnatural in Bridges :—

Profais, ni fethais, yn faith
O brif ieithoedd braf wythiaith
Ni phrofais dan ffurfafen
Gwe mor gaeth a'r Gymraeg wen.

I will only notice, then, a few of the devices which meet us most commonly. Here is a delightful double assonance :—

Beneath the sun at *indolent noonday*
Or in the *windy moon-enchanted* night,

A similar effect, inverted, is :—

In patient russet is his forest spread,
All bright with bramble red,
With *beechen moss*
And *holly sheen*, the oak, silver and stark, etc.

More suggestive of deliberation is the beautiful echo at the end of the *Elegy on a Lady* :—

The rest stand by in state
And sing her a safe passage over
While she is *oared* across to her new home. . . .

This perfect sense of the values of consonant, vowel and position extends to the least adorned of the poems. No one but the author of *London Snow* could have written even so trivial and apparently artless a stanza as the first of the Rondeau at the end of Book I. The line,

Hanging his quiver at his hips,

implies a whole store of delicate perceptions which few other poets have shown us. There is material enough in this little book of poems, were there material enough to develop it, for a whole system of extremely subtle art.

There is only one other point I need notice. It is a method which depends as much upon the association of subtle ideas as upon its appeal to the ear. Where alliteration and assonance are effective, I believe it is by reason of every word connoting by its sound alone at least one idea separate from itself. A combination of like sounds is useless unless it carries with it either a comparison or contrast of these harmonics of the language. It is astonishing how strongly an impression can be intensified by assonance, provided the com-

bination enforced is suggestive of the central word or idea. To consider, from Bridges' work, only a few effects :—

> Beneath the crisp and wintry carpet hid
> A million buds but stay their blossoming,

and

> And 'neath the mock sun searching everywhere
> Rattles the crisped leaves with shivering din

and

> The wood is bare : a river-mist is steeping
> The trees that winter's chill of life bereaves :
> Only their stiffened boughs break silence, weeping
> Over their fallen leaves.

and

> We skated on stream and pond ; we cut
> The crinching snow
> To Doric temple or Arctic hut.

I quote the first three examples for the assonance of the short " i," the fourth for the word " crinching." In each case their effect is to reinforce the idea and sound of the words " winter " and " chill." In the second quotation, " rattle " distinctly suggests another short " i "—that of the word " brittle." In the few instances in the *Shorter Poems* where assonance is unconvincing it generally fails to depend upon some such central idea. It is impossible to say whether the poet will ever be able to depend so fearlessly on the suggestive

colour of words as to systematize its use. If assonance is to mean the crude iteration of Swinburne, the idea will seem far-fetched. We are a long way from the day when the control of vocal colour and consonantal dynamics may be taught as definitely as the mixing of colours on a palette.[1]

[1] Of this century of poems, over two-thirds seem to me in some particular or other exquisite, and more than a fifth are of their kind flawless. It is not an altogether desirable manner of criticism to make a kind of honours list of a poet's work. But if I were asked for such an order of merit in the finer of the "S.P."—and Bridges has ventured to classify the Odes of Keats in this way—it would be this. Class I: Bk. II, 2, 7; Bk. III, 1, 2, 4, 7, 11, 13; Bk. IV, 23, 28; Bk. V, 7, 12, 16, 19. Class II: Bk. I, 9, 12; Bk. II, 3, 5; Bk. III, 3, 12, 17; Bk. IV, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 13, 15, 20, 30; Bk. V, 4. Class III: Bk. I, 2, 6, 11, 14; Bk. II, 10, 11; Bk. III, 5, 9, 10, 18; Bk. IV, 9, 11, 12; Bk. V, 3, 6, 9.

VI

MILTON'S PROSODY

One may generally recognize a definite advance in any art, in that it will meet with general disapproval. The prosody of Bridges has been more widely criticized, condemned and misunderstood than any aspect of his work. It is here that he breaks really new ground. When the *Shorter Poems* were first issued, work in the new, the so-called stress prosody, was carefully distinguished by small type. It was just these poems to which a distinguished living critic—whose work occasionally appears in garlands of poetry—strongly objected. The lyrics in large type pleased him greatly; the rest seemed to be hardly different from prose.

That was thirty years ago. By this time one or two critics of metre have helped us to realize that most English verse is prose, but that those bewildering adventures in small type were at least the indication of a true prosodic method. They are their own justifica-

tion, and I suppose there are few modern readers of poetry, and no poets, who find anything difficult or obscure about them. Bridges' innovation is, after all, not in itself very startling. Briefly, he substitutes for a line which is measured by syllables a line which is measured by stresses. This statement is made with many reservations; as that stress must not be interpreted as meaning definite emphasis of a syllable; that the number of stresses in a line is necessarily doubtful; and that a whole series of rhythms and conventions belonging properly to the old style have persisted into the new. Before defining the prosody of Bridges more carefully it is worth while briefly to examine the point from which he sets out, and his own views of prosody contained in the essay on Miltonic blank verse.

So much ink has gone to the explaining of English verse rhythms that it is time the critics realized that rhythm is not meant to be explained, but only to be understood. I do not suppose that Vergil could have "explained" his own prosody, or pointed out in what way it differed from Homer's. Unfortunately, too, almost the whole system of criticizing English prosody rests on a misapprehension. The fact is sadly appropriate in that English prosody also was founded on a

mistake. When a good Christian whose name is forgotten wrote :—

Laetus dies hic transeat :
Pudor sit ut diluculum,
Fides velut meridies,
Crepusculum mens nesciat . . .

he was producing what is, in form as well as spirit, poetry. But the author of such a stanza as this gave us neither :—

Consurgit Christus tumulo,
Victor vedit de barathro,
Tyrannum trudens vinculo
Et reserans paradisum.

The first is written to a definite scheme of long and short syllables ; the second has nothing to distinguish it from prose but an implied pause after every eighth syllable, picked out in this case by assonance.

English verse, from Chaucer and his imitators onwards, chose the second kind of structure for model rather than the first. It consisted of the division of speech into lengths which held each the same number of syllables ; and the divisions were usually indicated by a borrowed fashion of riming the final syllables of adjacent divisions. It was usual also, following an elementary rhythmic ideal, to contrive that not only this last syllable should be, for

further emphasis, stressed, but also every alternate syllable before it. Essentially its only difference from prose is that the reader is forced to divide it mentally into a succession of equal "lines." This, if it must be explained, is the explanation of English verse. But if mediæval writers of hymns perceived the form without understanding the method of these old religious poems and bequeathed their mistake to Western Europe in perpetuity, the "explainers" of prosody in the literature of this country have wandered even more pathetically from the truth. They have discovered the method too late and applied it where it no longer existed.

Bridges' essay on the prosody of Milton—which, by the way, was published in 1893, when the superb rhythmic effects of the *Shorter Poems* were already becoming known—has been praised deservedly, for its care and insight. The book is in itself sufficient to defend him against the common charges of "cold craftsmanship," "carpentry of metre" and the like; for it shows pretty plainly that, so far from being able to explain his own masterpieces, he is unable to give any but the barest account of the much simpler method of Milton. Obviously he appreciates the rhythmic subtleties of Paradise Lost as only a

poet can; but he begins his explanation of them thus :—

> A typical blank verse may be described as obeying these conditions : (1) It has ten syllables ; (2) It has five stresses ; (3) It is in rising rhythm, that is, the stresses are upon even syllables.

I should like to mitigate this rather alarming preface by remembering that such is probably the way in which Milton himself regarded his own majestic medium. Even so, the critic of verse would not be justified in making three postulates so utterly misleading; for it is notorious that the artist is generally incapable of explaining his own verse. But in his introduction, added eight years later, Bridges writes : " My intention throughout has been to provide a sound foundation for a grammar of English prosody on the basis of Milton's practice."

His attitude is, in a way, typical of the method of critics of prosody since the beginning of their perverse endeavours. *Milton's Prosody* is a careful piece of work, and contains some really suggestive appendices, but as a study of rhythm it is singularly unsuccessful. It is obvious to everyone that the typical line of Milton—who may be fairly assumed to have understood the writing of blank verse—has

less than five stresses, and is accented anywhere but upon even syllables. As Bridges himself points out in his conclusion: "We may say generally that Milton's system in Paradise Lost was an attempt to keep blank verse decasyllabic by means of fictions."

This is a judgment which cannot be disputed. Yet there is no reason but custom for compelling all critics of verse from Milton's day forward to be party to the fraud. Nonetheless Bridges advances logically from his hypothesis to elaborate precisely the same fictions. He treats solemnly of supernumerary syllables, of elision, of "inverted" stress, and generally of a "five-foot" line. His conclusions are perfectly accurate, and are evidently the result of much labour. But they do not take us a step further than any previous critics have done. While admitting, practically, that Milton did much to introduce the natural rhythms of speech into poetry, he continues to explain the finest lines of Paradise Lost in terms of "feet"—a word borrowed from criticism of classical prosody, in which the foot was, generally speaking, a known quantity with a definite relative value in time. It is this pseudo-classical foot rule that has vitiated all criticism of our poetry until quite recent years. It betrays itself in the use of classical

terms descriptive of quantity—"iambus," "trochee," "pyrrhic," "galliambic," and the rest.

To take even such lines as these from Chaucer :—

> A marchaunt was ther with a forkëd berd
> In motteleye, and high on hors he sat,
> Upon his heed a Flaundrisch bevere hat ;
> His botës clasped fair and fetysly . . .

and to describe them as iambic, is obviously absurd. They are stressed, certainly, on the even syllables ; and if many such consecutive lines were common in the Canterbury Tales they would be fairly unreadable. But the assumption since Chaucer's day, by poets and critics alike, is that the normal English pentameter line is a succession of iambic feet. This confusion of thought is accountable for much of the poverty of rhythm in minor English verse.

The inflexibility of metric scheme in classic poetry was joined with a free distribution of stresses ; and it is the weaving of natural speech-rhythms upon a quantitative metric base, in itself a constant rhythmic pattern, though quite differently obtained, that produces most of the metric beauties of the verse. In ordinary English poetry, quantity has no place in the rhythmic scheme, which has only

two elements: the normal stresses of speech, and the rather slender uniformity of a constant line length. If we postulate the division of a line into five "feet," each consisting of an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable, we are obviously taking great liberties with our standard when we admit "inverted feet" or "weak feet." By the time a line is found to have only two, or possibly one foot normal out of the five—and these are common enough in Milton—it is time we either looked for another explanation or turned our poet out of Helicon for tampering with the very ground structure of his art. If stress-iambics are the basis of English verse, the people who called themselves Augustans are our only poets—a point which they were logical enough to appreciate.

It is unnecessary to spend much time over the elaborate fictions of the critics who hold that the metrical unit of an English blank verse line is the foot, and that its rhythm is the result of alternate stress. All one need say of this theory is that it is obviously untrue, and that a fabric of even so slight a complexity as English prosody could not have been built upon such a wretched base. Moreover, nine of Milton's lines out of ten vary definitely from this norm. The first line of Paradise Lost contradicts it; and that it may

be "explained" by the phrases "inverted second foot" and "weak fourth foot" does not alter for a moment the fact that, if alternate stress be the basis of blank verse, it is a base which is rarely present, and often completely disregarded. Nor do I see how the persistent idea of such a base can be considered as an element in poetic rhythm. Such a line as :—

Universal reproach, far worse to bear

in which only the fifth and sixth and the two last syllables form iambic feet, does not seem as if it can gain any rhythm from an idea which directly contradicts the cadence of the first two "feet," and is not in accord with the third. Nor does the suggestion that the minority of "normal" feet in such a line serves to maintain the unity of the rhythm appear to be very much to the point. If it be so, it is preserving the idea of a rhythm which is undesirable, in spite of definite negation of such rhythm. If such irregular lines are written for the sake of enhancing rhythm—as one can hardly doubt—it cannot be the rhythm of the "normal" line which is enhanced.

There seems no way out of the difficulty but to confess at once that Milton's verse and most English verse since Milton has no

rhythmic scheme at all; any more than it has a metric scheme or a scheme of regular stresses. The only invariable element is the line-length. In the choruses of Samson Agonistes we lose the line also; and, in their formal aspect, we may as well admit, as did one Evans in 1852, that they are not verse at all. "Our truly lyric poetry must ever be a blank," said this despondent person; "an evil genius presided at its birth."

We are still a long way from a satisfactory scientific definition of rhythm in the abstract. But of poetic rhythm one may say at once that it is a compromise, or rather a resultant of two forces. Bridges himself has pointed out in a later essay[1] that quantity is the only factor that is alone sufficient to give rhythm. Variation of pitch alone—that is a succession of different notes of equal length and loudness—cannot produce it; variation of strength will produce only the most elementary impression of it. The Greeks, or whoever invented the Homeric hexameter, realized that in quantity was the only scientific basis for a prosody—a truth which still holds good. With the loss of the classical system of prosody, European verse became syllabic—that is,

[1] "A letter to a Musician on English Prosody," *Musical Antiquary*, October, 1909.

merely a matter of line-lengths, without regulation of stress, and with no regard for quantity.

In spite of the absence of quantity from the scheme of English verse, I am not aware that anyone has held that there is no such thing as poetic rhythm in the language. The poverty of rhythm, even in Milton, is obvious enough to any reader who will honestly consider Paradise Lost or Samson after a few hundred lines from the Æneid—provided, of course he read his Vergil rationally, with a bold disregard of the method of the older Universities. The rhythm of all English poetry before Coleridge, and of the greater part of it since, is the result of an accumulation of rhythmic effects, wrought one after the other from the unpromising material of a syllabic verse, and it is in this light that any honest account of rhythm must consider it. There is nothing in the "wretched skeleton" of the syllabic method to account for it. Even granted a basic idea of alternate stress, "inversions," "weak feet," and the like will not give us even an illusion of rhythm. The conflict is radically different from that between speech-pattern and metric-pattern, accent and quantity, in classical verse. If there is an opposition it is between two speech-patterns.

But I do not believe that in these days the idea of a " stress-iambic " line is present in the minds of any but those who set out to explain English verse with an array of classical labels. We must look elsewhere than to the foot for our English verse-unit. The ruling principle of English metre has lain from the first in the natural stresses of speech, and its unit must be found in natural combinations of these stresses within the more or less unvarying limit of the line. I am not denying that the idea of a ten-syllable line of five alternate stresses was the rule consciously accepted in Chaucer's day; but it is a rule which was even then accepted to be broken.

The alternate stress, to quote Bridges again,

> came to be the norm and bane of syllabic verse. In the absence of a philosophic grammar of rhythm, one can only offer opinions as guesses, but it would seem to me that alternate stress can only be of rhythmic value in poetry as the firmest basis of the freest elaboration. One's memory hardly reaches back to the time when it could satisfy one. The force of it always remains as one of the most powerful resources of effect, but its monotony is, to an educated ear, more likely to madden than to lull.

Resistance to the tendency has been obvious in our literature from the first. It is surprising how few even of Chaucer's lines con-

form to the standard. The influence of Langland and the northern poets was always present to Chaucer's school, whispering happy phrases which scorned the limits of alternate stress. One of the earliest liberties which can almost certainly be referred to the influence of the Latin hymns, was the " inversion " of the first foot. Chaucer begins innumerable lines with a stressed syllable.

Bright was the sonne and clear that morwenynge,

" Bright was the sonne " is a phrase any poet would be happy to set down; in addition, it shows one of the commonest rhythms of English speech. If then, such a speech-rhythm is permissible at the beginning of a line, why should it be denied a place elsewhere ?

Truthe and honoúr, freedom and curtesye . . .
Curteys he was, lowly and servysable . . .

wrote Chaucer, doubling the offence, and coming perilously near to the rhythm of the other school of poets who wrote their lines in balanced halves and cared not for syllabic strictness. In fact the normal rhythms of speech were not to be kept out of verse for more than a few years. Even one of the simplest stress combinations—a noun preceded by an adjective when each are of one syllable—generally gave two contingent stresses, and

called for the introduction of either a double-stressed or an inverted "foot." Compensation allowed the weak foot, already urgently demanded by the simple stress scheme of such phrases as "struck with his arm," "end of the tale," and the like. The structure did not, as one would expect, fall to pieces under this invasion; it slowly absorbed the phrasing of natural speech. It is essential to any poetic form of worth that it will accommodate the elementary rhythms of the language. The majority of five-foot lines in the older poets easily resolve themselves into two, or less often three, such simple stress groups. Their characteristic rhythms, slightly modified by the line, become steadily more common and familiar. Chaucer could hardly have written:

Wherein *old dints* / of *deep wounds* / did remain

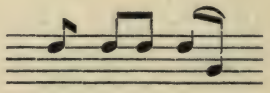
or

The soothe of birds / by *beating of their wings* . . .

but phrases of adjacent stress and of stresses separated by three light syllables, have since become the commonplaces of English verse.

I regard these short speech-stress combinations, or speech-phrases, as giving a far more natural analysis of the line than a fanciful division into feet. A line will fall easily and unmistakably into two or three

such phrases, which, as well as being the natural division which the sense of the writing demands, are the units of speech itself—for every pause in sense is marked by a change in pitch. Stress in English is not normally given by pronouncing one syllable with more vigour than another, except under conditions of special emphasis. It is usually expressed by a change of pitch, either on, after, or within the syllable which we describe as "stressed." The last word of a normal sentence, unless it be enclitic, is generally marked by a fall in pitch through nearly five tones. The syllable to be stressed is often influenced by derivation. Generally, if the word be a monosyllable the fall is within the vowel itself, whether long or short; if a disyllable, the stressed penultimate is in the higher pitch and the unstressed last syllable in the lower. The end of a normal stress phrase is marked by this cadence. Thus a combination of a disyllabic noun qualified by a disyllabic adjective—such as "A little learning"—may be musically represented thus :—



when the first syllable of "little" is only by courtesy graced with a stress because, taken

alone, it would carry the same cadence as "learning." In the second phrase the cadence is on the vowel of "thing."

This point is more significant in relation to verse-rhythm than it may appear to be. The two mechanical elements of English verse are a strict line-length and varied stresses, and it must be from a combination or opposition of these that rhythm emerges. Stresses again are varied, not in real or imagined opposition to a scheme of feet, but with a faithful regard for phrasing, for the little repeated melody to which groups of inseparable words are naturally set. Then poetic rhythm must differ from prose rhythm in some modification of this cadence not as opposed to the impossible tune suggested by five equal alternate stresses, but to the normal tune of the words apart from their verse setting. This, again, will be modified by conventional rhythms, as those of two or more phrases which have grown familiar as a possible disposition of the ten—or more—syllables which go to a line.

I would consider the following a far more rational and suggestive division of verse than the artificial foot-rule with its absurd symbols of long and short.

When forty winters / *shall* besiege thy brow
And dig deep trenches / *in thy* beauty's field

Thy youth's proud livery / *so* gazed on / now
Will be a tattered weed / *of* small worth held :
Then / *being asked where* all thy beauty / lies,
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,
To say / *within thine own* deep-sunken eyes
Were an all-eating shame / *and* thriftless praise.

This is obviously the only disintegration which the ear will accept. The italicized words connect one phrase with another, leading generally in a slightly ascending cadence from the lower pitch to the higher: though it should be noticed that a cadence which indicates only a pause, not a period, in sense, is exactly inverted. Thus the phrases "a little learning" and "a dangerous thing" are separately spoken to the same cadence. But in the line :—

A little learning is a dangerous thing

the cadence of "learning" is from a lower pitch to a higher, for there would be otherwise an awkward leap to the higher level of "dangerous."

The whole question of accent in English has been sadly neglected, and in the absence of a philosophic account of it, one can only indicate its broadest lines. One of the main principles appears to be that where, as is almost invariably the case, the final phrase of a sentence is in falling cadence, all phrases that lead up to

it hold a rise of pitch. In questions the whole sequence is sometimes reversed.

I should not have touched upon matters which are at present mainly guesswork if it did not seem to me that the distinction between syllabic verse rhythm and prose rhythm is mainly one of cadence. The question of accent is particularly deserving of detailed analysis in English; for I suppose the system is less touched by degeneration than in any European language. There is a definite tendency, however, to which one can point. While every phrase in a sentence is made to subserve the principal—which is generally the final—cadence, the connecting or enclitic words, such as those italicized in the Shakespeare octave above, are, in common speech, hurried over and given barely half their value in time. I have suggested that the only unchanging element in syllabic verse is the line-length, which seems to be an easily recognized constant. Previous to a temporal conception of rhythm, the effect of a larger use of natural speech-groups has been inevitably to preserve a counterbalancing strictness in the length of the line; just as syllabic irregularity was later atoned for by the regular grouping of stresses—an even harder tyranny. Thus Milton's elaborate "scansion" of his

stress-groups was not entirely academic. He surely realized the absolute need of syllabic strictness to maintain the proper balance between the factors then necessary to poetic rhythm. "... Rime gives no true musical delite; which consists only in apt Numbers; fit quantity of syllables; and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another." Where the elements of rhythm are so few, the length of the line has been found most important to it, as the persistence of rime which is merely a special emphasis of line-length goes to show. When the sense is drawn out from one line to another, it becomes more than ever essential to maintain the syllabic idea.

The line, then, is apparently responsible for the change of cadence in verse. The words which in ordinary speech are hurried over as being, in a sense, outside the succession of cadences must be given more value if the syllabic idea is to be maintained; partly by the emphasis of more careful pronunciation, and partly by being brought nearer in pitch to the important words of a speech-phrase. And since these transitional words are generally between different levels of pitch, the result of this change is a general and most noticeable levelling of pitch throughout. Hence the

most obvious distinction between syllabic verse-diction and prose-diction is in a general modification of cadence in the former towards a common level. Perhaps this is best illustrated when one who is reading verse breaks suddenly (perhaps because it seems to reach only a low poetic standard) into the up-and-down cadences of common speech.

It would be interesting to analyse the difference between the Shakespearian and the Miltonic rhythms, since Bridges derives so much from both manners. I will only indicate an effect of rhythm which I think we owe to the early Elizabethans. Though there is no essential difference in rhythm between the verse of Wyatt and Surrey[1] and that of Lyndesay, or even of Douglas and Hawes, their structure is more elaborate. There is a tendency to get more into a line, to shuffle clauses, bringing the verb at the end, and so on, which gives a line of three and more speech-phrases instead of the normal two. This was the first emancipation from the influence of the Langland school, which tended to preserve

[1] To whom, by the way, the late Professor Churton Collins, with the vagueness characteristic of those who talk about metre, attributed "the great reform which substituted a metrical for a rhythmical structure."

only two phrases in a line. This elaboration results in a line of quick and short phrasing with frequent pauses :—

> Ought to be King / from whose rules / who / do swerve
> And, / fools, / adore / in temple of our heart.
> True / and yet true / that I / must / Stella / love.

The grammatical pauses, slight as they are, introduce an element of syncopation. Such a line as :—

> If French / can yet / three parts in one / agree,

though the short phrasing even follows the old stress-iambic structure, carries a distinct opposition to that structure. Reading it smoothly, and without break, one is forcing it into a slightly alien mould. (The line will generally be read with a slight lengthening after "French," a slight pause after "yet," a lengthening of "three parts" and a pause after "one.") The effect of rime, again, in the sonnet form, is to make the whole line subserve the final cadence; that is, the correspondence of the lines demands very great smoothness. The contrast of this tendency with the syncopation produces a new and very subtle rhythmic effect. As a kind of compromise one finds, especially in Sidney, many lines which refuse to resolve themselves

into stress-combinations; where, in fact, the line is the phrase :—

> Gone is the winter of my misery.
>
> I never drank of Aganippe well
> Nor ever did in shade of Tempe sit.

There is no doubt, however, that Sidney and the early Elizabethans generally were running great risks of losing rhythm altogether in trusting it to minutely syncopated single-syllable bars rather than to the variation of freer phrasing. To this one attributes their marked return to the use of alliteration and internal assonance. Shakespeare, on the other hand, was the first to realize the allusive possibilities of the speech-phrase; one may note it in the intimate inter-relation of phrasing in most of the sonnets. Indeed, common speech-rhythms are used so freely that many of the lines, taken separately, are hardly distinct from prose; they are saved by this close relation of speech-phrases; and hence, I think, the directness and rapidity of the sonnets in spite of the intricacy of their conceits.

Milton's Prosody arrives at sound conclusions by means which one hopes we have seen the last of. The emancipation of normal stresses reached in Milton its furthest develop-

ment consistent with the syllabic idea. We have not improved upon it in syllabic verse. The rhythms of such a poem as Mr. Stephen Phillips' Christ in Hades, which has been warmly praised for metric originality, might have been deliberately moulded upon the "rules" which Bridges deduces from his examination of Milton. Nothing more is likely to be done in the emancipation of pure syllabic verse.

VII

THE PROSODY OF BRIDGES

THE prosody of Bridges is a combination of the stress and syllabic methods; it does not properly belong to either. The emancipation of stress-prosody is generally dated from the publication of Christabel, though Coleridge was obviously not true to his own intention of measuring a line by the number of its stressed syllables. From the freer forms of syllabic verse to verse which is deliberately regulated by stress was not a long way. The syllabic line was already overcharged with the liberties that had crept into it. From the dramatic licence which allowed a superfluous syllable, it was an easy step to allowing such a syllable in the middle of an unbroken line. By the time it was admitted almost anywhere the line was ripe for disintegration into its proper units. Stress-prosody is simply the recognition of the speech-phrase as the ruling principle of the verse without the hindrance of a constant line. Here Bridges shows a very sure appreciation of its meaning. In a masterly appendix

to *Milton's Prosody* he formulates some of the rules of stress-verse thus :—

I. The stress governs the rhythm.

II. The stresses must be true speech-stresses.

III. A stress has more carrying power over the syllable next to it than it has over a syllable removed from it by an intervening syllable.

IV. A stress has a peculiarly strong attraction for its own proclitics and enclitics.

V. A stress will not carry a heavy syllable which is removed from it by another syllable.

VI. A stress will not carry more than one heavy syllable or two light syllables on the same side of it.

Here are rules which the ear at once accepts as just. The fourth is a convenient way of expressing what the development of verse has already indicated—that the unit of verse is the speech-phrase, the natural sense-division, whether it be single-stressed or double-stressed. The distinction of heavy and light syllables is generally just, for natural speech-rhythms are determined by quantity far more than one suspects.

But Bridges neglects—in theory, not in his work—the immediate danger that comes with the abandonment of the line. If one has hitherto considered English verse as a succession of feet, it will seem no less reasonable to regard it as a succession of stresses each

attracting its own subordinate syllables. But as soon as it is realized that English verse since Chaucer has been just such a succession of speech-phrases, and that its rhythm has resulted from an unvarying line-length, it will appear that, losing the strict line, it loses an essential part of itself. Such a method brings us dangerously near to freeing the stress at the expense of the prosody. Speech-stress has always governed the rhythm; but in so-called syllabic verse there was a rhythm to be governed; in pure stress-verse there is not. The whole difficulty of the writers of stress-verse is to find an adequate substitute for the line-length, and up to the present they have failed. Bridges himself, with an instinctive realization of the danger, has achieved a consummately skilful compromise with the older manner. The bulk of the work in which he has made it really successful is very small. He has never published an unsuccessful attempt. He seems to have been aware that his method is not for lesser men to follow. At the end of an interesting appendix to *Milton's Prosody*—the best things in the book are tucked away at the end—he wrote :—

I will only add that when English poets will write verse governed honestly by natural speech stress,

they will discover the laws for themselves, and will find open to them an infinite field of rhythm as yet untouched. *There is nothing which may not be done in it, and it is perhaps not the least of its advantages that it makes excellence difficult.*

I am not contending here that strict form is essential to good poetry, or that its rhythms must necessarily be distinct almost in kind from those of prose. Such one would gather from Bridges' work to be his own view, in spite of the words I have italicized. But it is undeniable that the idea of a prosody whose recommendation is that "there is nothing which may not be done in it," is quite alien from the spirit of all the great art of Europe, including Bridges' own.

As a matter of fact a very short consideration of the small output of pure stress-prosody since Coleridge will be enough to prove its failure. The better poets—Coleridge himself, Shelley, and Tennyson—when they possibly imagined themselves to be following the new principle, have done nothing of the sort. The only verse governed honestly by disregard of everything but speech-stress has been that of Swinburne and his imitators, and the English accentual hexameter. Christabel, as has been often enough pointed out, does not follow the faith it professes. In the first fifty lines of the

poem there are nineteen that do not bear out the poet's declaration "that in each case the accents will be found to be only four."[1] In Shelley's Stanzas, April, 1814, there is the same mixture of styles. The typical line is apparently of six main stresses with a central caesura. There is not a single line that conforms with this type.[2] The line that most nearly approaches it is :—

The blooms of dewy Spring / shall gleam beneath thy feet;

where the implied stress on "beneath" is, from a standpoint of natural speech-stress, unjustifiable. Both poems are a compromise between the old manner and the new, and both are quite beautiful. It does not greatly matter whether we call them stress-verse with frequent omission and redundance of stress, or syllabic-verse with the greatest licence in the use of

[1] Three lines—including "The lovely Lady Christabel"—can only be admitted by courtesy of the conventional licence—borrowed from syllabic verse—which has always belonged to the final syllable of a line. Another line—"She kneels beneath the huge oak tree"—may be allowed four stresses, but one suspects they are not those which the poet intended. The regular lines include all the weakest in the selection. In the others the established rhythm makes a false stress. Most of the lines have the familiar rhythms of syllabic verse.

[2] Bridges makes the typical line of four stresses. In this case the divergence from type is much greater, while the first line is just as easily "explained" by placing a pause either before or after the first word.

superfluous syllables. Superficially, the first description is more appropriate; actually, I think, the second. Obviously the verse has no longer any scientific basis whatever, and I think the ear—which is the only real arbiter in these matters—will detect a certain loss of rhythm even where rhythm is most emphasized. That such a system will satisfy it at all goes to show how persistent the idea of the "five-foot" syllabic line as holding five stresses has been. Otherwise I do not see how we could so readily accept conventional unnatural stresses and subdue real ones.

But Bridges has a rule to meet the difficulty:—

> In some metres when four, and in any metre when more than four, unstressed syllables occur together, they will occupy the place of a stress, which may be said to be distributed over them; and a line in which such a collection of syllables occurs will lack one of its stresses.

Thus the element of time creeps back, but in far less obvious fashion than in the easily recognized value of a ten-syllable line. It is present as a kind of hidden pulsation upon which the rhythms of speech are loosely syncopated. This is a conception of verse which has grown very familiar of late, and

the critical explanations of Sydney Lanier and Mr. J. M. Robertson[1] are, on the whole, a very just presentment of it. Previously a metrist who had the advantage of being also a poet had defined metre as "something measured," namely, "the time occupied in the delivery of a series of words," which is measured by "an ictus or beat, actual or mental," dividing speech into equal or proportionate spaces. In addition, Patmore insisted strongly upon the importance of tone as an essential factor in metre.

This application of musical phraseology to verse rhythms has certain dangers. Obviously the idea of a regular pulse has been the actual base upon which a good deal of verse since Tennyson has been written. Consequently it is quite a fair way of explaining or analysing such verse. It is at best rather an elementary source of rhythm, and only the lesser poets have been faithful to it. It does not take a great deal of perception to discover that Tennyson's

Break, break, break,

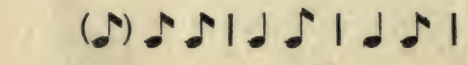
is approximately in three-time; that is, that the words follow each other at equal intervals

[1] Of which an excellent account may be found in Mr. T. S. Omond's "English Metrists in the 18th and 19th Centuries." (Henry Froude, 1907.)

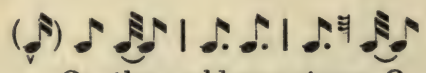
and may be represented as taking each with its pause the time of a dotted crotchet. The actual word is assumed to have the value of a quaver or of a crotchet. Actually, I suppose, a natural reading would make it nearly a dotted quaver. But when we come to the less simple structure of the next line,

On thy cold grey stones, O sea . . .

we are intended to distribute it, after a " silent stress," thus :—



Now it is obvious that no one but a hack composer of waltz tunes would tolerate such a perversion. The phrase " cold grey stones " refuses to accommodate itself to the lilt. Its poetic value is evidently that it echoes the rhythm of the first line ; and the three words will be as nearly equal in time as thought can make them. Moreover, the words " thy " and " O " will resent, in such a grave line, the scant measure allowed them. So we are driven back upon syncopation as the key to it—somewhat thus :—



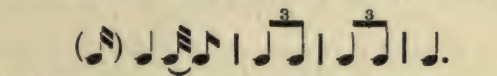
which is not very far from the actual pronunciation, but is pictorially a little startling.[1]

But no refinements of demi-semi-quavers will disguise for a moment that neither "cold grey stones" nor "O sea" is either written in, or in the least suggestive of three-time. Their divergence is so final that the idea of such rhythm is only an intrusion.

Since Lanier's theories became known on this side of the Atlantic, the musical scansionists have swarmed over the whole field of English verse, and instead of concentrating upon their legitimate prey—the late Mr. Swinburne—have set their metronomes ticking before every masterpiece since L'Allegro. By far the acutest of them is Mr. Ernest Newman, who has, I suppose, more right than most men living to state the case from a musician's standpoint. His statement[2] is ingenious :—

> All questions of scansion in English verse are really questions of rhythm; questions of rhythm are really questions of the co-ordination of sounds, groups of sounds, of equal value; questions of co-

[1] With a little sacrifice of truth we could write it thus :—



[2] From a series of articles on the "Rationale of English verse-rhythm" which appeared in the now extinct "Weekly Critical Review," Paris, September, 1903. I agree with Mr. Omond that the essay deserves to be far more widely known.

ordination of sounds are questions of time; and it is by reference to the time sense, to our unconscious perception of periodicity, that we can throw most light on the nature of verse rhythm. The main phenomena of the time sense in relation to sounds can be best investigated in music—the art in which the rhythmic sense shows itself in its most marked form. . . . For the important point is really the co-ordination of bar with bar. This is involved in our instinctive and almost unconscious lengthening of certain words (or our supplementing them by pauses) in order to satisfy the demand for the rhythmic senses of equality between one bar and another.

One welcomes this recognition of a system of minute lengthenings and pauses as taking a large part in the diction of poetry. The weak point in Mr. Newman's chain of reasoning is the failure to distinguish between the kind of rhythm we find in poetry and the rhythm of music. A philosophic definition of rhythm, if we are ever to have one, may tell us that essentially the two are one. In practice they are as wide apart as one can possibly conceive. If music gives us the rhythmic sense in its most marked form, the rhythm of poetry is certainly the most subtle and even obscure. Even so simple a phrase as "cold grey stones," as soon as one thinks of it in terms of English poetry, acquires a rhythmic quality which no musical analogy will go the least way towards

explaining. From the time when a " spondaic " foot was admitted to a " pentameter " line to let in the common phrase of three adjacent stresses, it has been accumulating and fixing its rhythm from the different circumstances of its use and from sources quite distinct from the musical idea, until it challenges any interference with its unanalysable mental refinements of cadence and value. The ideal rhythmic value of any speech-phrase may have had a casual and unscientific growth, but it is a very real part of our poetry. Hence when Mr. Newman distinguishes possible poetic rhythms as falling into bars of either two or three notes' value, and places even Miltonic verse in the second class, I would challenge his right to apply even the idea of musical rhythm to verse. And in any case I cannot believe that Paradise Lost is written in waltz-time.

But even if the associations of poetic rhythm were not so far removed from a musical idea, I do not believe that a musical basis could be applied to the making of poetry with any success. The more the subconscious craftsman is obsessed with the idea of a recurrent bar-beat, the less will true poetic rhythms be free to assert themselves. True, the musical scheme may compromise to the

extent of changing its bar-signature for every few words; and where music and words are joined, as in the chanting of psalms, this is a method which gives many beautiful and natural effects.[1] But in present-day music any rhythm is no rhythm: and musical ideas must go a long way before they can leave off even where poetry begins. A very little advance along these lines will mean the abandonment of bar-marks altogether. When Moussorgski, in one of his Songs of Childhood, marks successive bars:—

$\frac{7}{4}$ | $\frac{3}{4}$ | $\frac{7}{4}$ | $\frac{3}{2}$ | $\frac{3}{2}$ | $\frac{3}{4}$ | $\frac{3}{2}$ | $\frac{5}{4}$ | $\frac{5}{4}$ | $\frac{6}{4}$ | $\frac{5}{4}$ | $\frac{3}{2}$ | etc.

the game is only beginning. I suppose future song-writers will dispense with the bar altogether; for as soon as music approaches poetry intimately it will have to go.

There is no technical difficulty whatever that genius is not ready to master. Just as Wolf with the common apparatus of bars and time-signatures moulded his notes almost miraculously to the delicate songs of Mörike, Bridges has made a temporal basis subserve intensely beautiful effects of poetry, as no poet has done before, and none is likely, I think, to do again. The difficulty appears to be mainly this: that line-length and line-

[1] Bridges himself has made experiments in this direction.

cadence can, by distributing influence over a succession of speech-rhythms, produce poetic rhythms even though the lines only tend towards a normal length and a normal cadence; but that the idea of the bar cannot be so distributed over several phrases, but must fall directly on the words supposed to be included in it. Hence, even if it be possible that rhythm may be produced within a few words by contrast between the rhythm of a bar and of those words, it is obvious that unless extraordinary skill be brought to each bar, the syncopation will be too violent for the delicate poise of word-values to withstand. If, again, its influence is allowed to extend beyond the bar, by what Bridges calls a distributed stress, the whole structure of the line is disorganized, the need of bars vanishes, and the diction falls back upon line-length as its time-unit. That poets of some reputation have been apparently content with the contrast, or rather the flat contradiction of a persistent beat with natural speech-rhythms, does not make them the less offensive.[1]

[1] In Appendix F to *Milton's Prosody* Bridges writes:—

"Next to his mistake of admitting conventional stresses I would mention another practice of writers who have attempted the freer verse based on stress, which is this: they set up a rhythm in the first lines, and expect that this will assert itself throughout the poem, in spite of false quantities and conventional stresses. This, though it has not hindered the poems so written from being much

Such lines as :—

Earth is thy covering to hide thee, the garment of thee.
Thou art swift and subtle and blind as a flame of fire ;
Before thee the laughter, behind thee the tears of desire ;
And twain go forth beside thee, a man with a maid ;
Her eyes are the eyes of a bride whom delight makes afraid,

are pretty bad judged by any standard of rhythm. Set to music, with a drum beat to emphasize the rhythm, they would be more than intolerable.

Bridges' method is to avail himself of all the freedom which a stress-prosody allows, and at the same time to mitigate with every available device the anarchy to which it leads. Briefly, he abolishes syllabic strictness for the sake of introducing new and expressive speech-rhythms, and simultaneously restores the element of time, leaving their freshness unimpaired. The whole of his achievement in stress-prosody is to enforce the idea of regularity in line-length while avoiding suggestion of a recurrent bar-beat. It is impossible to find a principle which applies to the whole of his work in this manner. Every line shows its

praised for their rhythmical flow . . . shows also a greater misapprehension of the qualities of stressed verse, one chief advantage of which is that no rhythm need be exactly repeatcd. The constant repetition of the same stressed rhythm in every line must produce sing-song, and it is a clumsy remedy to break the sing-song at the cost of the prosody."

own device to escape from the double pitfall of stress-prosody, the dilemma whose horns are music and prose. At a first glance the prosody of the *Shorter Poems* is not strikingly different from that of Maud. Critics who felt moved to approach it with the apparatus of classical terminology would find no great difficulty in explaining it when they had once accustomed themselves to a pretty free use of the words "dactyl," "anapæst," and "galliambic." The other school could beat time to it without a more than usually painful violation of the decencies of speech. It has, no more than Christabel, an unvarying number of stresses to the line. But the main point is that intelligent readers of poetry—who will probably not analyse it at all—find nothing in it that is not perfectly fit and rhythmically satisfying.

One can only suggest a few of the reasons why Bridges' essays in stress-verse are poetry although they have rather finally broken loose from prosody. Analysis of poetic technique can only be useful in giving us a fairly expressible reason for not liking certain developments of it. If the ear approves such work as *London Snow* or *Whither, O splendid ship*—and I suppose they are now recognized as being rhythmically quite flawless—any other justification is impertinent.

Of the three principal devices which we find more or less common in all the poems, perhaps the most significant is a very frequent use of lines which, taken alone, diverge very little or not at all from the familiar " pentameters " of syllabic verse. The first line of *A Passer-by* and these from the same poem :—

> That fearest nor sea rising, nor sky clouding.
>
> And anchor queen of the strange shipping there.
>
> And yet, O splendid ship, unhailed and nameless
>
> Thy port assured in a happier land than mine.
>
> As thou, aslant, with trim tackle and shrouding,
>
> From the proud nostril curve of a prow's line,

might, as far as form goes, have been written by Milton. Their coincidence with the old form is more than casual. It is a kind of recurrent suggestion of a stricter manner which tends very strongly to appease the ear. It contributes, too, to the unflagging variety of rhythm which betrays Bridges' hatred of any suggestion of sing-song. Another effect of this manner is the very pleasing contrast with which it atones for and enhances the bolder rhythms of stress-prosody as insistence upon the idea of a recurrent beat could never do. Such is

the very beautiful emphasis of these lines from *November* :—

> Out by the ricks the mantled engine stands
> Crestfallen, deserted,—for now all hands
> Are told to the plough, . . .

and the contrast I have already noticed in the opening lines of *The Downs*.

Very often, again, the form of these lines must be made the justification of rhythms which a strict temporal scheme will not admit. The phrase of three adjacent and nearly level stresses, which was first used freely in Elizabeth's day, takes a great deal of explaining when it steals into verse which is supposed to keep three-time. Swinburne could not, I think, have introduced " white sails crowding " into his favourite measure without making one wince. Yet the occurrence of the rhythm in *London Snow*, where very few of the lines keep strict syllabic length, is very beautiful and convincing. The truth is that Bridges, even in his more advanced stress-prosody, consistently uses the rhythmic phrases of syllabic verse with almost exactly the value they would have had in the old manner. This would be impossible if a temporal beat were strongly emphasized. As it is, I find in it a strong suggestion of syllabic verse, even where the lines are unquestionably written on a basis

of stress. The best developments of Bridges' prosody have risen naturally from syllabic verse in very much the same way as freedom of phrasing within the line. Such a stanza as this :—

> There shows no care in heaven to save
> Man's pitiful patience, nor provide . . .

from the same manner—in which the temporal beat gives perfect justice of phrasing—leads naturally to that in which phrasing is counterpointed upon a syllabic structure :—

> While ever across the path mazily flit
> The dreamy butterflies
> With dazzling colours powdered *and soft glooms,*
> *White, black and crimson stripes, and peacock eyes.*

One cannot leave this point without reference to the work of a man whose name is still quite unknown, and the bulk of whose poetry has never been published. The late Gerard Hopkins, S.J., was a writer with a very real poetic gift, whose metres were consciously elaborated from common syllabic types. We have no record of the theory upon which he worked, but I believe some idea of stress-equivalence formed part of it. A great deal of his work was so obscure both in metre and diction that there is little chance of its ever becoming popular. I quote one very beautiful

sonnet to illustrate a quite remarkable similarity between his prosody in its simpler form and that of Bridges, which suggests that he had attained by experiment the same compromise between stress and syllabic verse. It will make it fairly obvious, too, that he was not merely a craftsman.

Look at the stars ! look, look up at the skies !
O look at all the fire folk sitting in the air !
The bright boroughs, the quivering citadels there !
The dim woods quick with diamond wells ; the elf-eyes !
The grey lawns cold where quaking gold-dew lies !
Wind-beat white-beam ; airy abeles all on fire !
Flake-doves sent floating out at a farmyard scare !
Ah, well ! it is a purchase and a prize.

Buy then ! Bid then !—What ?—Prayer, patience, alms, vows,
Look, look ! a May-mess, like on orchard boughs ;
Look ! March-bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow sallows,—
These are indeed the barn : within-doors house
The shocks. This piece-bright paling hides the spouse—
Christ, and the Mother of Christ, and all his hallows.

But the chief element in Bridges' prosody, which makes a general summary impossible, is a very delicate sense of quantity. It is not reduced to any system, but it may be found almost anywhere through the *Shorter Poems*. It is a sense not only of what may be legitimately borne by a stress, but the precise time-

value of each speech-phrase in the line. It is obvious from the first that a really considered prosody of stress cannot afford to neglect quantity. I think it is an instinctive recognition of this point which allows one to describe much of Bridges' more advanced verse as having prosody in spite of its freedom. He recognizes, for instance, the difference in value between a stressed long vowel and a stressed short vowel. In such lines as this, from *London Snow* :—

> The eye marvelled—marvelled at the dazzling whiteness ;
> The ear hearkened to the stillness of the solemn air,

there is, if I am not mistaken, a very clear sense of the time-value of every syllable.

By means of these three devices, or rather instinctive adjustments, he has made it possible to free English verse from the trammels of the syllabic line. Perhaps, as he suggests, not the least advantage of his method is that it makes excellence difficult. Never has any method demanded such a perfect sense of the material value of words and phrases. A poet who attempted to build up such a prosody according to rule would certainly fail. Its richness is, as it were, only a single facet of the many-sided jewel of his verse. At its dullest it is too complex to be anything but spontaneous.

VIII

THE DRAMAS

THE eight published plays of Robert Bridges are more than equal in bulk to the rest of his work. It has often been said that Lyrical Poetry is typically a by-product from the crucible of Drama, and, for this reason, I suppose we must be glad that they have been written. I do not know what was the size of the original editions, but one, at any rate, the first part of *Nero*, is out of print; and however great or small a vogue they may have had in their own day, it is certain that they have given rise to a good deal of unintelligent criticism in ours. Certainly it is unfair to judge them as they have been judged, by the standards which a Renaissance of Poetic Drama has created. They are only another illustration of that impatient return to ancient methods which sprung, as I have already suggested, from the poet's discontent with the outworn creeds of his time. They are frankly derivative. *The Feast of Bacchus* is "in a

Latin manner"; *The Christian Captives*, *Achilles in Scyros*[1] and *The Return of Ulysses* are "in a mixed manner"; while *Palicio* is labelled Elizabethan. In the appendices to these plays Bridges has acknowledged his indebtedness to other dramatists from Menander to Calderon; and for this reason it is only by the conventions of these "manners" that he can be fairly judged.

In the majority of the Bridges' plays drama resolves itself into a string of situations, passionate, intellectual, or fantastic, in which puppets, entangled almost beyond hope in the dramatist's own elaborate snares, gradually shake themselves free,—by the dramatist's permission. It implies a convention that holds dramatic dignity inconsistent with an every-day setting; so that every drama is in spirit, if not in fact, a costume play. I suppose the idea of Drama as a thing transcending every-day experience, or at least as only symbolical of such experience, was adopted with the intention of keeping its poetry unfettered, and in this tradition Bridges has only followed the lead of such writers as Byron, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne and Morris. Indeed, it is strange that Drama should have gained so

[1] I have thought it best to treat *Achilles* in company with the other Masks.

little from the concentration of these poetical intelligences upon it, and that we should have needed to wait till the twentieth century for the poetical drama which Synge found, not among their stately abstractions, but among the peasantry of the Arans. The secret of a living drama is to strike a just balance between the action and the idea. The poets in their disgust with the wooden materialism of drama as they found it tried to coax it into life by imaginative flights, and failed because the other essential was neglected. Bridges, elaborately scheming to cover the old stage carpentry with a gloss of poetic richness, has failed for a slightly different reason: because his plays have been a loose mixture of the two elements, lacking that intense heat of conception which fuses both into the imperishable alloy.

At the same time I do not believe that Bridges would have chosen the newer modes even if he had been writing plays in the flush of the dramatic revival. To make it clear where we stand, I quote a passage from Mr. P. P. Howe's able monograph on Synge. He sums up a sermon on the misuse of the word "dramatic" thus:—

> To come to life, and thus to the theatre, "with pleasure and excitement," is of the essence of the making of drama. If poetry be "emotion remembered

in tranquillity," as Wordsworth said, the drama is, or must seem to be, emotion visualized in action, however tranquil the after mood of the dramatist.

Now to Bridges, drama obviously means nothing of the sort. In nearly all these plays one finds the expression of emotion—which in the end amounts to the influence of character upon action—the means rather than the end of drama. Characterization does not figure in the scheme of the play as by inalienable birthright but by courtesy; and when it reveals itself it is sometimes even disconcerting to the precise figures which the author is putting through their paces. It is as though a marionette should suddenly come to life, like the puppets in Pétrouchka, and with something of the same horror one trembles lest more than sawdust should be spilt.

In the Dramas, as in the *Shorter Poems* and the Sonnets, he shows a fastidious choice of material. I do not think he could ever have found the exploits of a character so shameless as Christy Mahon, fit subject for drama, any more than the sorrows of Nan. Such characters and such emotions fall outside his conception of the dignity of poetry, and this I imagine to be an almost insuperable bar to his success as a dramatist, whose business, in whatever "manner" he may be writing, is to come to

life " with pleasure and excitement." In the first section on the *Shorter Poems* his limitation of the field of poetic beauty was discussed; and this, together with the misnamed " Puritanism " of *The Growth of Love*, is actually symptomatic of a very real divorce from life as we know it, from the universal " dusty damn'd experience." To say broadly that his poetry is a product of the study is a ridiculous heresy which has arisen from a careless reading of his work; but to claim that he sees life whole is equally undiscriminating. If you will you may call this " isolation " a matter of temperament; and there are passages in *The Growth of Love* which suggest an early struggle :—

> I will be what God made me, nor protest
> Against the bent of genius in my time,
> That science of my friends robs all the best,
> While I love beauty, and was born to rhyme.
> Be they our mighty men, and let me dwell
> In shadow among the mighty shades of old,
> With love's forsaken palace for my cell;
> Whence I look forth and all the world behold.

Perhaps we should say " half the world." And I think his immersion in old stories, that Renaissance preoccupation which so absorbs this clerke of Oxenford, only accentuates the isolation of the man from the life of his age.

He even endeavours to justify it on a philosophical basis :—

> The philosophic mind
> Can take no middle ways ;
> She will not leave her love
> To mix with men, her art
> Is all to strive above
> The crowd, or stand apart.

As again, in *Wintry Delights*, he speaks of "the sacred aloofness from life's meagre affairs" which the elect enjoy. But this is not the spirit in which Drama is written. It implies an unsympathetic attitude towards the struggles out of which Drama arises, and an incomplete understanding of those who breathe an atmosphere differently composed from that of his own golden clime.

You can see that he is genuinely sorry for Keats : the social condition of his parents, he says, probably excluded him from contact with the best types. No doubt this is perfectly true ; but it almost seems as if this critic's "pleasant unhindered order of life, his happy enchantments of fortune, easy surroundings, courteous acquaintance," have excluded him from contact with any but the best. And it takes all types to make a theatre. I have already attributed to him an aristocracy of manners, and the obligations of such nobility

leave him uncomfortable in the treatment of unsympathetic characters. The servants in the third act of *Humours of the Court* show him at his worst.

In view of this it is fortunate that he has written two essays with indirect bearing on drama which help us to understand his theories of dramatic propriety and compare them with his practice. The Keats essay we have already considered and may now dismiss with the mention of one characteristic pronouncement. "Keats," he says, "lacks the essential moral grasp for drama." But the essay on Shakespeare calls for closer examination. The main idea of the work is to show that Shakespeare was "all things to all men": that the title As You Like It might have been made a motto for the bulk of his work. I do not think this point had been amplified before, and as a fact it is indisputable. But he goes on to separate "the matter that most offends my simple feelings" in Shakespeare's plays. After rebuking him for his bad jokes, and the mere verbal trifling "which was aimed at a part of his audience with which we are little in sympathy," he reflects seriously and at length on Shakespeare's indelicacy:—

> The fault is found chiefly [he says], in the earlier plays, and the history is generally free from it, but

the women are tainted, and it is seldom entirely absent. It cannot be wholly accounted for by any theory that does not involve the supposition that he was making concessions to the most vulgar stratum of his audience, and had acquired the habit of so doing, and this supposition is confirmed by the speech of Hamlet to the players, where Shakespeare has put his own criticism into Hamlet's mouth.

Now it seems to me that there is another theory by which the grossness of Shakespeare can be accounted for, and by which, if it were for a moment necessary, it might be defended. For even admitting that some of Shakespeare's clowning scenes are foolish ; that his brutality is a survival out of darker ages, his lewdness flung contemptuously at an audience of lackeys, without these things we should feel that he had lost something of breadth and universality. Some people might possibly respect him more : many would certainly love him less. Already we have a whole gallery full of Hamlets ; but there is only one Falstaff, and the worth of Falstaff is not purely dramatic. Without Shakespeare's catholicity of feeling for mankind in its soarings of the spirit, its exaltations of the flesh, its grossness and its splendour, there would be little truth in Bridges' own happy account of the matter :—

What shall I say ? for God, whose wise decree
Confirmeth all He did by all He doth
Doubled His whole creation making thee.

For the grossness of Shakespeare is like the grossness of Rabelais, in which Arthur Machen has seen nothing but a symbol of ecstasy : " the shape of *gauloiserie*, of gross exuberant gaiety expressing itself by outrageous tales, by outrageous words, by a very cataract of obscenity." And it is like the exultation of the double-basses in Beethoven's C minor symphony. Rabelais himself fantastically explained, through the mouth of the priestess Bacbuc, the springs of this godlike laughter :—

Vos academiques l'apprenant rendons l'etymologie de vin, lequel ils disent en Grec OINOΣ, estre com VIS, force, puissance.

And it is this *puissance*, this dynamic essence of humanity, which Bridges the critic disapproved, that Bridges the writer of dramas lacked. We must not look for it in these plays. We must be contented with a good deal of ingenious stage-carpentry ; the twisting and unravelling of a number of intricate knots that have no very serious connection with the skein of life ; and a great deal of very beautiful lyric poetry that crops up in the most unlikely places. We are told that all

(except the first part of *Nero*) are intended for the stage; but I very much doubt if any of them would act, unless it were perhaps the Terentian *Feast of Bacchus* and the *Christian Captives*.

This play seems worth a more detailed analysis than the rest, because it offers a little more characterization than usual, and even rises at times to a flicker of dramatic intensity. The story is derived from Calderon's El Principe Constante. The scene of the play is a castle of the King of Fez, near to the sea, now in the occupation of the Moorish troops who are engaged in a Spanish campaign; and to this place the King has summoned his daughter Almeh. He is a man with one aim in life—the recapture of the city of Ceuta, lost to the Christians in the days of his fathers; and now the prize seems almost within his grasp, for the Portuguese forces are depleted, his army is at the height of strength and enthusiasm, and he only needs the help of the Moroccan cavalry, under their prince Tarudante, to assure success. Almeh, whom he offers to Tarudante in marriage, is his highest card. "Win me Ceuta back," he says,

> And drive the idolaters across the sea
> Ere thou take home my daughter for thy queen.

Into this peaceful garden, where Almeh has lately been enchanted by the singing of a company of Christian prisoners, comes Sala ben Sala, Fez's greatest general, a man of chivalry and courage, and devoted to the princess. He has escaped alone from the unexpected defeat of the Moorish forces, and that only by the clemency of Ferdinand, in his "angel fairness."

> The moon to them—
> —That was our peril—the accursed yellow moon
> Exposed our camp, while in the shadowy glens
> The night hid their attack.

Almeh, alone with Sala, pleads for the Christian captives who have taken her fancy; she weighs their freedom against the clemency of Ferdinand. She tells him how she has heard their hymns.

> ALMEH. 'Twas last night, Sala, as I lay long awake
> Dreamily hearkening to the ocean murmur,
> Softer than silence, on mine ears there stole
> A solemn sound of wailful harmony:
> So beautiful it was that first I thought
> This castle was enchanted, as I have read
> In eastern tales; or else that 'twas the song
> Of people of this land, who make the sea
> Their secret god, and at midnight arise
> To kneel upon the shore, and his divinity
> Beseech with shrilling prayer: or then it seemed
> A liquid voicèd choir of spirits that swam
> Upon the ocean surface, harp in hand,

Swelling their hymns with his deep undersong.
That was the Christian captives,

SALA. 'Twas the night
Softened their wails to sweetness : as the space
'Twixt hell and heaven makes the cries of the damned
Music to the angels.

Even as Sala yields he sees the portrait of Tarudante that the King has left, and is caught up in a storm of jealousy.

The second act introduces the captives themselves. They appear as a chorus, at first singing the hymn "Jesu dulcis memoria," and later speaking with Almeh, explaining to her the art of their "many-voicèd skill." This use of the chorus in an historical play, in which they do not function as a commentary but actually as persons of the drama, is fatal to illusion ; and when, at the sound of Moorish drums and trumpets, Almeh tells them to go, and they reply, presumably in unison,

We will depart and mourn
Within our sultry pit,

the device verges on the ludicrous. On the stage, I doubt if the play could possibly survive the *longueurs* of this act.

The Moors, with Tarudante's aid, have turned the tables. They return proudly with the Christian leaders, whom they have taken

prisoners, Prince Ferdinand and his brother Enrique. Almeh's fancy is immediately attracted by Ferdinand and repelled by the Moorish Prince. Enrique, seeing Almeh's beauty, exclaims :—

> These be the Moorish arab; such a race
> Sprang never from the sooty loins of Ham.

"Devil, or angel, or Arab," replies Ferdinand, "she has stolen my soul"; and above these asides one hears the voice of Tarudante :—

> Such perfect grace, such speech and modesty
> Outbid my fancy; I would fight thy battles
> For twenty years to call this treasure mine.
>
> THE KING. I say she is thine, and she is my only child.

Thus we find ourselves concerned with a parallelogram of forces: the King's, Sala's and Ferdinand's love for Almeh, to which may be added Tarudante's declared affection, which is of the kind which goes to the making of royal love-matches. Sala sees in Ferdinand's captivity a chance to repay his old debt in chivalry, and begs his freedom. The King refuses. Ceuta is the only treasure he can match with Ferdinand's life, and Ceuta Ferdinand will never surrender.

The chorus, with whom the prince speaks by Sala's permission, are irritated by his scruples in the matter; they see in the

surrender of Ceuta the end of their exile, and beg Ferdinand to yield for their sake as for his own. I confess it is rather dull reading: there is no getting beyond the inhumanity of this chorus. Still there are memorable lines. Ferdinand's

> Hath not Ceuta
> Been as Christ's tourney, where the nations
> Have clapped their hands to see a few brave knights
> Hold Africa at bay,

and the effective line in which he describes Tarudante's army, with a Miltonic inverted fifth foot:—

> I was here; I had come
> Even to this castle, when behold, swarming
> Innumerable from the hills around
> The horsemen of Morocco.

There is a nice sense of the value of place-names in the chorus's speech.

> Nay, we remember well
> Estramadura, we remember Tagus,
> The banks of Guadiana, and our homes
> Among the vineyards; Ezla we remember,
> Obidos and Alenquer, where the trees
> Shadow the village steps, and on the slopes
> Our gardens bloom: where old Montego laves
> The fertile valleys 'mong the hills of Beira.

And there is little more in the love-passage between Almeh and Ferdinand: love with a salting of proselytizing.

But the third act opens with one of those "lyrical intermezzi" that so often astound one in reading the Bridges plays. This time it is Almeh who speaks :—

O delicate air, inviting
The birth of the sun, to fire
The heavy glooms of the sea with silver laughter;
Ye sleepy flowers that tire
In melting dreams of the day,
To splendour disregardful, with sloth awaking;
Rejoice, rejoice, alway;
But why are ye taking
My soul to follow you after,
To awake with you, and be joyful in your delighting?
Ay me!

And it is followed by one of those flower-songs which we have grown to expect; this time the flower is familiar; none other than the already loved sea-poppy.[1] Almeh sends her maid to pick these "yellow roses" and, in another love scene, she begs Ferdinand, once more, to surrender Ceuta for the sake of his companions and himself. Tarudante, rather bored by the delay and Almeh's inclination for Ferdinand, decides to leave the army; and Sala, overwhelmed by jealousy, proposes to risk releasing Ferdinand. He reveals his

[1] Or perhaps the yellow-flowered iceplant, which is common on the North African coast.

love for Almeh, telling how he has watched her from her childhood, and seen

> From being a child, suddenly she was a woman
> Changed beyond hope, to me past hope unchanged,

—a pretty Elizabethanism. When Ferdinand persists in his determination to stay with his fellow prisoners, the general even threatens to kill him if he will not go. And when the King, worried by Almeh's disaffection, and on Sala's advice, consents to release all the captives, the prince included, on the day when she shall wed Morocco—"Canst thou not thank me, and smile on Tarudante?"—Almeh, to save Ferdinand, consents in four expressive lines :—

> I thank thee, sire.
> If I seemed to not thank thee, 'twas the effect
> Of suddenness, nothing but suddenness.
> I am glad to do it.

When she tells the prince the cost at which his freedom is purchased we have another courtly declaration of love, another courtly answer. "How canst thou love and fear?" says Ferdinand.

> See, I can teach thee how to trust in love,
> Now with this kiss.
> *Enter* KING, TARUDANTE, *and* SALA.

Naturally, Tarudante no longer wishes to stay

where he is not wanted, and the King, in his proper Ercles vein, swears he will kill Ferdinand.

KING. He is gone—
Incredible! Consenting: I could not gloss it:
Before my eyes, the eyes of Africa.
Is this her secret? this her melancholy
That cannot love? Treachery and apostasy!
Or is it that sick passion some have suffered
For things strange and detestable. I will see her:
She shall renounce it.—Hola! (*Calling*) Ho! within—
No cure but that: immediate disavowal,
Ere 'tis too late. O shame! (*Calls*) Ho there, within?

Enter SERVANT.

(*To Servant*) Give word that the princess attend me here.

Exit SERVANT.

That devil knows; he looks as if he knew.
And Sala knew it. 'Twas for this he urged
The villain's liberty. He shall go free . . .
To hell . . . and I will grant such liberty
To all who have seen him. There's one hiding-place
Where I may stow dishonour. But for her,
My daughter; if yet perchance there is any spot
In all her heart untainted by this shame
Which I may reach, that natural piety
May feel my yearning sorrow. . . . Tenderly,

Enter ALMEH.

Tenderly must I work. Lo, where she comes,
Her shameful head bowed down with consciousness.
Come, Almeh, come; come nearer. See:
Thy tender grace, thy beauty's perfect flower,

The vesture of thy being; all thy motions,
Thoughts, and imaginations, thy desires,
Fancies and dreams: whate'er from day to day
Thou art, and call'st thyself, what is it all
But part of me? Art thou the beauteous branch,
I am the gnarlèd trunk that bore and bears thee;
The root that feeds. I call thee not to judgment;
Only to save what most I prize, thy name,
And mine: there's one way that can be: Morocco
Hath taken his leave: before he leave must thou
Beg him to see thy injury avenged,
And for thy honour's sake must on thy knees
Bid me revenge it. If on the same day
The Christian prince insulted thee he die,
And die at thy request, before the eyes
That saw thy shame, ere busy tongues can tell
A tale in the ear, such speedy penalty
Will fright the scandal to a tale of terror,
And save our name. Withal he is a prince,
And that a prince should die may well atone.
What sayest thou, child?

ALMEH. Bid me not speak.

KING. Thy tears
And sobs I cannot read. I bid thee speak.

ALMEH. O father!

KING. Speak!

ALMEH. Thy words, recall thy words.

KING. What words?

ALMEH. Thy words of blood.

KING. Ah, Almeh! Almeh!
Art thou my daughter?

ALMEH. O sire, on my knees
I beg.

KING. Well, what?

ALMEH. His life! his life!

And so, persuasion failing, he dismisses Almeh, and calling Sala, decrees a death by starvation to Ferdinand :—

> Let not his life
> Outdrag three days. But hark: in spite of vengeance,
> And in remembrance of his claim on thee,
> He may go quit upon the old condition,
> Ceuta :—thou understandest ?

Almeh determines to share her lover's fate. She attempts, through her maid Zapel, to let Ferdinand know what she is doing. Zapel gives the letter to Sala, who clumsily allows it to fall into the King's hands. The King is moved :—

> How would my crown
> Shine 'mong the blessed caliphs and the martyrs
> Who fell in fight upon the road of God ?
> How would they look upon me,
> If 'mong the moon-bright scimitars I came,
> My child's blood on my head ? and she not there,
> The fair flower of my life, the bird of grace,
> Which my long-withering and widowed tree
> Held to the face of heaven,
> Now from my own trunk be my own hands torn
> Better the bole be split : heaven's lightning rend me :
> All curses seize me. Almeh, thou must not die.

A herald from Portugal confirms his melting mood. Edward, the king, is dead, and Ferdinand now is regent of Portugal. The

prospect of a possible alliance cheers him; he sees Ceuta within his grasp. He sends for Ferdinand, who comes upborne between two Moorish soldiers. They sit together, alone on the darkening stage, while the King gives him Almeh's letter, tells him of his own succession to power and tries to coax the shadow of a man back to the will to live. He even offers him Almeh's hand.

FERD. What hear I? Wouldst thou then
Have given me in good faith Almeh to wife?
(*Makes motions towards food.*)
KING. And will. Ay, drink.
FERD. And Ceuta?
KING. That is mine,
Her price.
FERD. (*thrusting things from him*). Ah, never.
KING. Dost thou then refuse?
FERD. It cheereth death to spend my last breath thus.
KING. Sittest thou there, balanced 'twixt death and life
Daintily making choice, and to my offer
Of all that God could grant thee, life and love,
Wrung from me by my sorrow, to my shame
Preferrest the Christian hell? O Infidel,
Apostatizing dog, lest now thy mouth
Should find the power to grasp one broken speech
Of triumph over me, die at my hand.
Death shall not rob me of thy blood that's left,
(*Stabs* FERDINAND *across the table.*)
Thus let thy brother find thee, if I fail
To send him also thither, where thou goest,
To thine idolatrous and thieving sires.

And at the close of this fine scene the unimaginable chorus mourn antiphonally.

With moonrise the ghost of Ferdinand, a very gratuitous ghost, appears to frighten Sala and the King, who have returned to the scene of the murder. Messengers arrive to say that their scouts have seen the phantom Ferdinand ride at full speed into the Christian camp. A night attack is planned against the Portuguese forces, and the fourth act finishes.

I could wish that there were little more, for with the death of Ferdinand the interest is waning; or at least the final triumph of the Portuguese, which here fills the place of the trumpets of Fortinbras, should have been hurried on. Perhaps Bridges, shrinking from any Shakespearian violence, thought to mitigate his late transgression by the moonlight scene in which the distraught Almeh relates her vision of judgment, before she dies on the body of Ferdinand, and the chorus justifies its existence by accounting for the murderous King. I quote part of this lovely fragment for its sheer beauty: to the drama it means less than nothing.

ALMEH. Air, air! that from the thousand frozen founts
Of heaven art rained upon the drowsy earth,
And gathering keenness from the diamond ways
Of faery moonbeams visitest our world

To make renewal of its jaded life.
Breathe, breathe! 'Tis drunken with the stolen scents
Of sleeping pinks: faint with quick kisses snatched
From roses, that in crowds of softest snow
Dream of the moon upon their blanchèd bowers.
I drink, I drink.

ZAPEL. If thou wilt tarry here,
Let me go fetch thy cloak.

ALMEH. Where is my father?

ZAPEL. He is not in the castle.

ALMEH. Where is Sala?
I must speak with him.

ZAPEL. They are both sallied forth
To assault the Christian camp.

ALMEH. O then 'twas true
The noise I heard. They are fighting: 'twas the guns,
The shouts I heard. I thought 'twas in my ears.
—I have had strange visions, Zapel, these last days:
'Twere past belief what I have seen and heard.
I'll tell thee somewhat when I have time—O love,
If thou wouldst be my muse,
I would enchant the sun;
And steal the silken hues,
Whereof his light is spun:
And from the whispering way
Of the high-arching air
Look with the dawn of day
Upon the countries fair.

ZAPEL. See I will fetch thy cloak. (*Exit.*)

ALMEH. This is the reason
Why all's so quiet. Sweet peace, thou dost lie.

> Men steal forth silently to kill: they creep,
> That they may spring to murder. Who would
> think,
> Gazing on this fair garden, as it lieth
> Lulled by the moonlight and the solemn music
> Made everlastingly by the grave sea,
> That 'twas a hell of villainy, a dungeon
> Of death to its possessors. Death.—

But Enrique's speech, which closes the tragedy, is a thoroughly consistent piece of the Bridges ἦθος.

I have treated this play at some length because, in spite of the dignity and colour of the diction and the fact that the lyrical outbursts are here more in keeping than usual, I feel that undue praise has been given to the construction of these dramas, of which it is the best. The constant exigencies of the *scène à faire;* the threadbare devices ("See, he comes") by which the characters are brought on to the stage; the loose mingling of colloquialisms ("food and an hour of rest will make me fit") with the heavy manner: all these things are fatal to dramatic illusion in whatever "manner" a play be written. Here, as in the rest, the characterization is elementary, except perhaps in the case of Sala and the King, who, after all, are not of a very complicated personality. Even the final grief of Almeh is conventional in colour.

There is only one thing for which these plays cannot be disregarded, and that is the really beautiful poetry which smiles at one, from time to time, through their coldness, like a flower pushed through snow.

Palicio, the Elizabethan romantic drama, is taken from Sicilian history of the years about 1500, and Bridges also makes acknowledgment to de Stendhal for some of his incident. The beautiful flower-song from the fourth act I have already quoted in another place; and this is only one of many poetical beauties. In the first scene of all there is a memorable description of Palermo—and one that suggests other cities of which we know.

> Your city
> Approached by sea, or from the roofs surveyed
> Smiles back upon the gazer, like a queen
> That hears her praise.

And again, this charming atmosphere of early morning :—

> How fresh the morning air is. See how the mist
> Melts in the sun, and while we look is gone.
> Leisurely gathered on his sloping beams
> And guarded by her angel-towers, the city
> Sleeps like an island in the solemn gray.
> 'Tis beauteous—

And again, Margaret's song of joy in the third act :—

MARGARET. Forgive, she saith, Forgive me rather, oh
heavens !
The sourness of my spirit hitherto :
Yet now forgive me not if I dare tamper
With this intrinsic passion. O joy, my joy !
This beauteous world is mine :
All Sicily is mine :
This morning mine. I saw the sun, my slave,
Poising on high his shorn and naked orb
For my delight. He there had stayed for me,
Had he not read it in my heart's delight
I bade him on. The birds at dawn sang to me,
Crying " Is life not sweet ? O is't not sweet?"
I looked upon the sea ; there was not one,
Of all his multitudinous waves, not one,
That with its watery drift at raking speed
Told not my special joy.

But here, as before, the history takes a lot of dreary telling, and that mostly because the people are not conceived in terms of flesh and blood. The drama stands ready to hand ; it only needs the animation of a man who comes to its life " with pleasure and excitement," and this it has never had. Against it one may write down an incredible number of banalities which stand out in relief from their pretentious setting. Sometimes there is a looseness of grammatical expression, such as :—

Go, set his room as if he had never been,

at others a gross lack of reality, as in the scene

when Palicio addresses his comic-opera brigands :—

ALL. Huzzah! Huzzah!
PALICIO. Thank you, my men . . .

or this gem of poetical drama :—

MARGARET. May I see Constance?
ROSSO. At once, but come prepared to find her weak.

For the *Humours of the Court* there is even less to be said. The court is of the kind which one finds in Shakespeare's comedies, but much more polite; and the bulk of the humour is unconscious. We have a great many of the stock devices of comedy introduced with a disarming *naïveté;* changed names, and even changed hats; a heap of the weak jokes for which Shakespeare had been so solemnly rebuked. I suppose the greatest failure of all to be Tristram, evidently intended for a comic fellow; and when Diana, in the second act, declares that "he is profoundly dull" we wonder if the humour is, after all, as unconscious as at first we had imagined. St. Nicholas is a gentleman who has been to school with Don Adriano in Love's Labour Lost, and learnt next to nothing. Sir Gregory, the deaf major-domo, is fairly successful as a type; but it is unfortunate for Diana's credit as a heroine that she should have fits.

IX

THE DRAMAS

It has to be confessed that, apart from Achilles, which I have considered as belonging to the masks, the only Bridges play that would "act" even passably is a translation. In stage-craft the *Feast of Bacchus* is a decided improvement on the Heautontimoreumenos from which most of it is faithfully taken. In the original we find the inevitable prolixity, and a tangle of plots under which a modern audience would grow very restive. *The Feast of Bacchus* is, as a matter of fact, nearly six hundred lines longer than its model, if one excludes the Prologue; but it has less difficult ground to cover.

The selection and modification of material is in some ways characteristic of Bridges. The play is quite Terentian in atmosphere—indeed one is surprised to find that only one-sixth of the Latin original remains. The result is a Terence who could be introduced into almost any drawing-room, so thoroughly has he been expurgated and polished. And yet the thing

remains Terentian. Bridges' genius for imitation, which I have had occasion to notice before, shows itself at its strongest in this piece of work. Here we have a Terentian play without the two or three lewd and scurrilous slaves, with only one lady of doubtful virtue, and with characters who are at the same time boisterous and gentlemanly. Bridges had very properly pointed out that he has a right to take what liberties he pleases with an author who possibly changed his original out of all recognition. We can only guess how far Terence's

> excellent
> Adjusted folds betray
> How once Menander went.

I do not wish to labour the point, but it seems to me that the Athens of the New Comedy would hardly have been satisfied with anything so innocuous and un-Bacchic as the *Feast of Bacchus*. The *dimidiatus Menander* would not, one imagines, deliberately coarsen his original. It is likely that Menander was every bit as coarse as Terence. In exercising a strict censorship over the original, Bridges has lost us a good deal that is characteristic and almost necessary to appreciation of the work, something vigorous and satyric, the harshness of the violent wines of the south.

His exact liberties with the play are hardly worth a minute examination. When he turns aside from his original, it is pretty easy to see the reason. The comic slaves Dromo and Syrus are certainly ill-mannered and tiresome; Bridges leaves them out altogether. This saves us at least the constant bickering between master and slave which, if it were really a feature of Athenian manners, must have made life a burden to any young gentleman with a taste for intrigue. The function of the slave being to provide an ingenious ruse whenever his master wants one, he becomes a very important part of the mechanism of the play. Syrus and Dromo are unattractive examples, and we do not regret their loss. Without them it becomes necessary to find a convenient go-between in the innumerable negotiations. For this function Bridges creates an entirely new character, Philolaches, an actor, who just misses being Terentian, but makes a quite satisfactory substitute. The story of Antiphila's exposure would, in the author's opinion, deprive Chremes of sympathy. His gentle consideration for his characters certainly brings the play to a very happy ending. In the original, he tells us, "The play, though marked by Roman taste, is a work of high excellence; but, as it stands,

would be unpresentable to a Christian audience." But one's sympathy for the characters in a Terentian play is not, as a rule, very lively. After all, they are generally puppets (and heathen puppets at that), and one is more tempted to join in the shout of derision that one imagines spreading through the Roman audience when one of them is made to look ridiculous than to shed gentle tears over his misfortunes.

And yet the play is Terentian. I have found little except the passages that are marked as translations that I could persuade myself might have been written by Terence. Yet something of the vigour and the ecstasy remains, in spite of the author's own admission that this atmosphere does not please him. Again, if one forgets Terence, the play would make a very pleasant comedy for amateur acting. It runs pretty smoothly from the first scene to the last. There is a great deal of verbiage, and the plot is a little feeble from a modern standpoint, but a clever actor could put a good deal of humour into most of the parts. I am afraid Cæsar's judgment of Terence could be equally well applied to Bridges :—

Levibus atque utinam scriptis adiuncta foret vis
comica, ut equato virtus polleret honore
cum Græcis, neve hac despectus parte iaceres.

There is a certain amount of unexpressed humour, however, especially in the character of Menedemus, who quite engages one's sympathy. He has a charming simplicity. The rest of the characters do not live. The young men are no more convincing than Terence's; Philolaches is exaggerated; Bacchis—" whose badness," the author tells us, " still weights the play "—has the merit of being obviously painted. Her name has been changed to Gorgo.

Perhaps the real charm of the play is the delightful metre in which it is written throughout. The author describes it as " a line of six stresses, written according to rules of English rhythm." Unfortunately there are no rules of English rhythm. Roughly, however, the metre follows the rules suggested for lighter English stress-verse in an appendix to *Milton's Prosody*, which I have already quoted. Sometimes a stress is " distributed." The opening speech of Chremes, which forms the beginning of the Terence play, but is delayed in this version, gives an excellent idea of it. A natural emphasizing of the sense, the author tells us, gives all the rhythm that is intended.

Menedemus, although our acquaintance has been but short
And only dates from the day you bought this piece of land,

And came to live close by me : for little or nought but that
Occasioned it, as you know : yet my respect for you,
Or else your being a neighbour, for that itself, I take it,
Counts in some sort as friendship, makes me bold and free
To give you a piece of advice : the fact is, you seem to me
To be working here in a manner which, both to your time of life
And station, is most unsuitable. What, in Heaven's name,
Can be your object ? What do you drive at ? To guess your age
You are sixty years at least. There's no one hereabouts
Can show a better farm, nor more servants upon it :
And yet you do the work yourself, as though you had none.
Never do I go out, however early in the morning,
Never come home again, however late at night,
But here I see you digging, hoeing, or at all events
Toiling at something or other. You are never a moment idle,
Or shew regard for yourself. Now all this can't be done
For pleasure, that I am sure of, and as for any profit,
Why, if you only applied half the energy
To stirring up your servants, both you and your farm
Would do much better.

For the wiles of the two slaves we have a scheme, invented by Philolaches, in which he and Pamphilus disguise themselves as Persians and try to extract money from Chremes by pretending to bring news of Clinia. The scene contains some delightfully sonorous lines of mock Persian, and a good deal of humour. One appreciates, too, Chreme's summing up of Attic comedy in the fourth act :—

Fifty per cent of all our Attic comedies
Have this same plot, a daughter stolen in early years,
Lost sight of, despaired of, almost forgotten, and then at last,
When least expected—although there's scarce a soul in the house
That does not know or guess it beforehand—she reappears.
Then are not all eyes wet ? . . .

The Feast of Bacchus stands out among the plays as at once the most readable and the most playable. Its humour is often a little anæmic, and in one or two places fails badly. But for the most part it rings true enough, and atones for a good deal that is tedious even in the simplified—and in many ways, improved—reconstruction of the plot.

Of *Nero*, which is published in two parts, and was begun and finished at very different stages of Bridges' craftsmanship, one is forced to admit that it has most of the failings of the other dramatic work, and is redeemed by less than the usual amount of poetry. The first part, alone among the plays, is not intended for the stage. One imagines that it is an early effort at dramatic writing, and need not challenge serious criticism. It shows us the young Nero wishing to reform the world, and enforces fairly adequately the grim contrast of the murders of Britannicus and Agrippina. We do not shudder at the tale of intrigues and

counter-intrigues. The story does not gain a glimmer of effectiveness in dramatic form. We have not the sense of savage irony that seems to underlie the suave conversation of the Corinthian proconsul and his friends in Anatole France's wonderful story. Bridges' Nero is not subtle enough to be convincing, and the irony is laid on with a very heavy hand. The "dramatic qualities other than scenic" in which we are told the work is an exercise, are, we suppose, just these attempts at suggestiveness. But when Bridges is suggestive, we know precisely what he is suggesting. If the phrase is admissible, his hints contract the attention where those of M. France expand it.

The second part of *Nero* is comparatively successful. It has colour and movement, and even characterization. Seneca is the Seneca we know, but he is carefully drawn. Nero's portrait of himself is the best thing in the play :—

> I know that there is no man in the world,
> Nor ever was, but hath his flaw : In some
> 'Tis a foul blot, that in the eye of nature
> Stands out unpardonable and unredeemed
> By all the school of virtues, howsoe'er
> They dance in grace around it : In another
> 'Tis like a beauty-mark, a starry mole
> Which on a virgin's body but sets off

The dazzling flesh, that else were self-extinguished
By its own fairness—Yet by these flecks and flaws,
Whate'er they be, 'tis fated that men fall :
And thus may I, nay must ; unless in time
I heed good warning, for my fault is gross.
I am over generous ; yes ; ye say it ; I know it.
That is my flaw. . . .

The least considerable of the plays is *The Return of Ulysses.* If I were to criticize it, it would only be to repeat my reasons for condemning so much of the rest of Bridges' dramatic work. I wish I could agree with Dr. Warren that it gives us at last an adequate dramatic setting of the Homeric story. Personally I would rather read the translation of Butcher and Lang. I have searched vainly through the play for a single passage that seems to me really worth quoting, either for its dramatic merit or as poetry. Even the blank verse is less skilfully handled than usual. Even the lyric " Happy are the Earth's heirs " has no lustre. In one or two places the affected archaism of the language is not only ugly but impossible.

X

CLASSICISM

In an earlier chapter I have tried to show that the method of Bridges is, by his own definition, classic rather than romantic; but there is a very considerable legend that has marked him down as a classical revivalist, a man who has squandered his powers in elaborate imitation: and this legend has grown side by side with that other which pictures him a mere experimenter, however brilliant, in the aridities of technique. What could be more natural? Did not Horace keep his vintage nine years by him?—are not the titles of the plays and of the set of masks: *Achilles in Scyros, Eros and Psyche, Demeter,* and *Prometheus,* evidence enough,—to say nothing of the *Experiments in Classical Prosody?* Indeed, the journalists have managed to make a very plausible case for this heresy out of his titles and from the names of his characters: though it would be safe to say that much of *Prometheus* is nearer to Whitman than to Æschylus, *Eros and*

Psyche nearer to Keats than to Apuleius, and *Achilles* as far removed from the original legend as is Oxford from Scyros. That he can give us the flavour of the classics in his English is a thing that no one who has heard the version of *Ibant Obscuri*, or the masterly transcript from the Iliad[1] can doubt. An isolated passage, the reply of the phantom Palinurus, will illustrate this :—

And lo ! his helmsman, Palinurus, in eager emotion,
Who on th' Afric course, in bright starlight, with a fair wind,
Fell, by slumber opprest, unheedfully into the wide sea.

for :—

Ecce gubernator sese Palinurus agebat
qui Lybico nuper cursu, dum sidera servat,
exciderat puppi mediis effusus in undis.

I am not sure that the Bridges version is not more suggestive than the original. The hint of space, in those broad plains stretched beneath a Mediterranean sky, contained in the adjacent spondaic stresses : " bright starlight, with a fair wind," is marvellous ; even though " unheedfully into the wide sea " cannot match the lassitude of Vergil's " effusus in undis." The passage might stand on its own merits among the best epitaphs on seamen in the Greek Anthology. Again, we have

[1] As yet unpublished.

already seen how, with a baffling misuse of the Terentian material, he has caught the spirit of Terence in the *Feast of Bacchus:* but to consider these masks as derivative work in any sense of the word is to miss the flavour of three poems which belong to the present day as much as to any.

For the purpose of this study I have included *Achilles in Scyros,* which is either a delightful mask or an execrable drama, under the former heading. As a play it has all the defects which we have noticed, in an exaggerated form. There is no vital attempt at characterization except in the case of the rather shadowy Ulysses of the "wide brow and restless eye." The action too is negligible; and the one dramatic moment—Achilles' choice of the sword from the pedlar's pack—has been robbed of all delicacy by the arrangement of the trick on the stage. Deiadamia's chorus of maidens, not distantly related to the fays of A Midsummer Night's Dream, are only more convincing than the Christian Captives by virtue of their setting. Abas is an elementary Sala Ben Sala in chiton. And we are sorry for none of these things. They are all forgotten in the lucidity of a consummate poetical technique, in the overflowing measure of beauty that drowns this starry island of the

Ægean in its bathing blue; fresh-blown beauty of scattered wind-flowers, the beauty of tall ships, and, overspread, the flush of joy and of unwithering youth. Take for example the picture of the Cretan ships joining the anchored fleet at Aulis, as the old king saw them on a misty morning :—

The next day at dawn
I played the spy. 'Twas such a breathless morning
When all the sound and motion of the sea
Is short and sullen, like a dreaming beast :
Or as 'twere mixed of heavier elements
Than the bright water, that obeys the wind.
Hiring a fishing boat we bade the sailors
Row us to Aulis ; when midway the straits,
The morning mist lifted, and lo, a sight
Unpicturable.—High upon our left
Where we supposed was nothing, suddenly
A tall and shadowy figure loomed : then two,
And three and four, and more towering above us ;
But whether poised upon the leaden sea
They stood, or floated in the misty air,
That baffling our best vision held entangled
The silver of the half-awakened sun,
Or whether near or far, we could not tell,
Nor what : at first I thought them rocks, but ere
That error could be told, they were upon us
Bearing down swiftly athwart our course ; and all
Saw 'twas a fleet of ships, not three or four
Now, but unnumber'd : like a floating city,
If such could be, with walls and battlements
Spread on the wondering water : and now the sun
Broke through the haze, and from the shields outhung

Blazed back his dazzling beams, and round their prows
On the divided water played : as still
They rode the tide in silence, all their oars
Stretched out aloft, as are the balanced wings
Of storm-fowl, which returned from battling flight
Across the sea, steady their aching plumes
And skim along the shuddering cliffs at ease :
So came they gliding on the sullen plain,
Out of the dark, in silent state, by force
Yet unexpended of their nightlong speed.
  Those were the Cretan ships, who when they saw us
Hailed for a pilot, and of our native sailors
Took one aboard, and dipping all their oars
Passed on, and we with them, into the bay.

Here, then, is a fine piece of classicism. The appendix will tell you, if you do not know it already, that it is an imitation from Calderon : Muley's well-known speech from Principe Constante. Whether it were imitated from Turner or from Æschylus would make little difference to the fact that it is a beautiful piece of writing, that shows, if there were need to show, the poet's unrivalled mastery of blank verse. It bristles with technical subtleties. Consider (at random) that exquisite chiasma of ideas :—

> But whether poised upon the leaden sea
> They stood, or floated in the misty air.

But beauty is squandered here so lavishly that it is difficult to quote. What does it

matter that the chorus are impossible dramatically when, in answer to Deiadamia's,

> Be not afraid,
> I will begin, sweet birds, whose flowery songs
> Sprinkle with joy the budding boughs above,
> The airy city where your light folk throngs,
> Each with his special exquisite of love—
> Red-throat and white-throat, finch and golden-crest,
> Deep murmuring pigeon, and soft-cooing dove,—
> Unto his mate addrest, that close in nest
> Sits on the dun and dappled eggs all day.—
> Come red-throat, white-throat, finch and golden-crest,
> Let not our merry play drive you away.

they reply :—

> And ye brown squirrels, up the rugged bark
> That fly, and leap from bending spray to spray,
> And bite the luscious shoots, if I should mark,
> Slip not behind the trunks, nor hide away.—
> Ye earthy moles, that burrowing in the dark
> Your glossy velvet coats so much abuse ;—
> Ye watchful dormice, and small skipping shrews,
> Stay not from foraging ; dive not from sight.—
> Come, moles and mice, squirrels and skipping shrews,
> Come, all, come forth, and join in our delight.

And let this speech of Achilles stand for love in idleness :—

> See, while the maids warm in their busy play,
> We may enjoy in quiet the sweet air,
> And through the quivering golden green look up
> To the deep sky, and have high thoughts as idle
> And bright, as are the small white clouds becalmed
> In disappointed voyage to the moon.

But if it were ever necessary to convince a reader that Achilles is very far from being a hawking of old goods, I should point to the great chorus—a Lydian chant, he calls it—"in praise of music makers"; for Lydian hill-sides never knew such music, and the philosophy which informs it is as modern as Whitman. As a lyric it is fit to take its place with the greatest of the *Shorter Poems*, for to these it is akin in its vernal rhapsody; but the recognition in the later stanzas of this Hymn of Earth of

> The omnipotent one desire
> Which burns at her heart like fire
> And hath in gladness arrayed her

reveals that happy wisdom which often marks the highest poetic achievement in this man's work.

> For God, where'er he hath builded, dwelleth wide,—
> And he careth,—
> To set a task to the smallest atom.
> The law-abiding grains,
> That hearken each and rejoice:
> For he guideth the world as a horse with reins;
> It obeyeth his voice,
> And lo! he hath set a beautiful end before it.

This chorus is more than a Hymn of Earth or of Poetry. It is another fountain of Joy.

Achilles in Scyros seems a thing fragile with

the beauty of its own anemones in comparison with the first of the Masks proper : *Prometheus the Firegiver*, which is written " in the Greek manner." The very name suggests a massive treatment ; for this myth of suffering and revolt has already stirred so many passionate intelligences. One thinks of the first Prometheus, and those of Shelley and Goethe, realizing that this, of all the old stories, has been chosen as most worthy to carry the burning fire of a poet's metaphysic.[1]

The expected massiveness is there ; there is much that is statuesque and Greek about the whole of the poem, which is indeed of rare and finely-chiselled perfection ; but you will look in vain for the flaming metaphysic of revolt, or indeed for any other metaphysic. The title is suggestive of this intent : *Prometheus the Firegiver*. It is neither a philosophical treatise nor a tract, but a poem, pure and simple, wherein

> Nature had kissèd Art
> And borne a child to stir
> With jealousy the heart
> Of heaven's Artificer.

It is only concerned with the rebellious spirit that wooeth Beauty, with the gift of fire, the

[1] Just as Scriabin, to-day, has chosen it to express his theosophical ideas in music.

beauty of fire, and the joy that radiates from its beauty.

The Miltonic cast of the Prologue declares itself in such lines as :—

> He with brute hands in huge disorder heaped,

but no sooner have we come to the Servant's unfired faggot than we stumble upon a passage which is as surely characteristic of Bridges :—

> I see the cones
> And needles of the fir, which by the wind
> In melancholy places ceaselessly
> Sighing are strewn upon the tufted floor.

Or again :—

> Such are enough
> To burden the slow flight of labouring rooks,
> When on the leafless tree-tops in young March
> Their glossy herds assembling soothe the air
> With cries of solemn joy and cawings loud.

A note which finds a faint echo in the flight of Hera's doves, a hundred lines later, drifting

> Down to the golden tree :
> As tired birds at even
> Come flying straight to house
> On their accustomed boughs.

The first chorus too is full of exquisite rhythmical subtleties which only show how freely he moves within the limits of a strict form; while the tissue of the verse is shot with

strange sea-lights, ruffled by the breath of winds, and chequered with shadows of moving cloud. The chorus closes with the lovely movement of the Hesperides dance :—

> And 'neath the tree, with hair and zone unbound,
> The fair Hesperides aye danced around,
> And Ægle danced and sang " O welcome, Queen,"
> And Erytheia sang " The tree is green ! "
> And Hestia danced and sang " The fruit is gold."
> And Arethusa sang " Fair Queen, behold,"
> And all joined hands and danced about the tree,
> And sang, " O Queen, we dance and sing for thee."

Whether *Prometheus* would even satisfy the very slender demands which the stage makes upon the Mask form is another question. I doubt if the story, as here related, would sustain much interest. The long pages of dialogue, always technically interesting in the study, would hardly survive the superficial judgments of the theatre ; for in spite of their technical perfection the thought is never very original, and the expression often runs to platitude. There was certainly no necessity in the scheme of the poem for this kind of thing :—

> Tho' weak thy hands to poise, thine eye may mark
> This balance, how the good of all outweighs
> The good of one or two, though these be us.

Perhaps it is partly because they are imbedded

in such stiff deposits of unrhymed heroic that the two great Odes, "A coy inquisitive spirit, the spirit of wonder," and "My soul is drunk with joy," shine here so brightly. Indeed the stanzas "O my vague desires" always seem to me to read better in *Prometheus* than in the slightly different version of the *Shorter Poems*. Even so, the bulk of the blank verse is noble and dignified; while in one passage, the climax of Prometheus' narration of Io's fated wandering, where he leads his hearers through frozen Thrace and Scythia to the shuddering desolation which surrounds his own martyrdom, is a crescendo of horror unequalled since the Elizabethans.

In *Demeter* the conditions are reversed. The opening is magnificent: but as one proceeds the work seems to lose grip and impetus, almost as if a task entered upon with enthusiasm has been finished listlessly or under protest. As a matter of fact the whole poem was written within the limits of a single month: a point which should be of interest to the writers who have seen in Bridges' work a slow and deliberate "carpentry of metre," seeing that it happily disposes of their theory. It is noticeable that in this—the first long poem since the publication of the *Experiments in Classical Prosody*—he makes a free use of

quantitative measures in his choruses. Such is the first chorus of Oceanides whose lovely choriambics seem to swim into new fields of rhythmical beauty; and such are the iambics of the Ode "O that the earth, or only this fair isle wer' ours." And I think that throughout the blank verse, as well as in the choric measures of this poem, it is obvious that Bridges has been "thinking in quantity"; so that what it loses in perfection of polish it gains, as surely, in suggestiveness. It is a pity that such beautiful things as the Iambic Ode should have been hidden from those who only know well the *Shorter Poems*. I quote it as one of his loveliest lyrics :—

O that the earth, or only this fair isle wer' ours
Amid the ocean's blue billows,
With flow'ry woodland, stately mountain and valley,
Cascading and lilied river;
Nor ever a mortal envious, laborious,
By anguish or dull care opprest,
Should come polluting with remorseful countenance
Our haunt of easy gaiety.
For us the grassy slopes, the country's airiness,
The lofty whispering forest,
Where rapturously Philomel invoketh the night
And million eager throats the morn;
With doves at evening softly cooing, and mellow
Cadences of the dewy thrush.
We love the gentle deer, and nimble antelope;
Mice love we and springing squirrels;

To watch the gaudy flies visit the blooms, to hear
On ev'ry mead the grasshopper.
All thro' the spring-tide, thro' the indolent summer,
(If only this fair isle wer' ours)
Here might we dwell, forgetful of the weedy caves
Beneath the ocean's blue billows.

In a very different vein is the charming "version" of Apuleius' story of *Eros and Psyche*. Mr. Symons thought it cold with "the coldness of work done, however sympathetically, as task work," and "but half alive." I find in *Eros* some of the most consistently beautiful and delicate of all Bridges' work. It is no easy matter to avoid monotony through three hundred and sixty-five stanzas of which a dozen, without really skilful handling, would bore one to distraction. The pleasant conceit of dividing the story into four "seasons" and these again into months, each with its proper complement of days, may contribute to the debonair lilt with which the story moves along. But apart from its many well-concealed devices, it is a delightful work, with frequent moments of a very rare beauty. It shows, too, a consummate mastery of narrative which owes very little to its original. Apart from a fairly strict faithfulness to the order and incident in Apuleius' story, the colour and spirit of the poem is as different as

it could well be. The languid and artificial prose of the Alexandrian gives place to a vivacious delight in the narrative possibilities of the legend.

Properly considered, I suppose *Eros and Psyche* is an allegory on the worn theme of the relation of love to the soul. But one may conveniently forget this in the sheer charm of the narrative without losing a single merit in the poem. From the splendid first line :—

> In midmost length of hundred-citied Crete

we taste the clear air of the Eastern Mediterranean. There is hardly a stanza that does not hold some special beauty—a charming rime effect, an exquisite stroke of natural description, or a touch of almost Vergilian tenderness. Its tints are vivid and delicate, like those of some old tapestry that has kept its colour unimpaired, but touched with a certain mellowness. We feel that the poet is telling of " old forgotten far-off things," and yet we see the very colour of the grass, the mountain peaks, and the wide landscape. The method of this Epyllion is really that of a series of miniatures joined by the thread of the narrative, each leading inevitably to the next. Here and there is a little touch of philosophy so skilfully laid on that it even enhances the charm of the story.

The special beauties of them are so many that hardly one stands out beyond the rest. Some of the best things seem to be deliberately concealed, so carefully is the classic mean preserved. Even the tiresome behaviour of some of the characters, especially the celestial chagrin of Aphrodite, only lends variety to the limpid flow of the verse. From the moment when Psyche is left on the mountain-top to her mysterious lover, when

> Now the sun was sunk, only the peak
> Flash'd like a jewel in the deepening blue . . .

and she is wafted to her grassy plateau, we step into a fairyland that has all the luxuriant loveliness of Spenser's. The only flaw in the description of her entertainment by the servants of Eros is an anagram on the name of Purcell; and even here the beauty of the verse excuses the lapse in taste. And the commonplaces of mythology have never been used in English verse with such charming effect. Here is a stanza from the picture of the tapestry in Eros' house :—

> Here Zeus, in likeness of a tawny bull,
> Stoop'd on the Cretan shore his mighty knee,
> While off his back Europa beautiful
> Stept pale against the blue Carpathian sea ;
> And here Apollo, as he caught amazed
> Daphne, for lo ! her hands shot forth upraised
> In leaves, her feet were rooted like a tree.

Frequently in the earlier part of the poem are passages of a curiously fragrant quality that reminds one of the most famed tellers of old tales. The charm of such lines as these is too frail to bear analysis :—

> Which said, when he agreed, she spake no more,
> But left him to his task, and took her way
> Beside the ripples of the shell-strewn shore,
> The southward stretching margin of a bay,
> Whose sandy curves she pass'd, and taking stand
> Upon its taper horn of farthest land,
> Lookt left and right to rise and set of day.

And this clear and tender note meets us often in some casual passage of description. The actual scenery of Crete, the lie of the land, is brought in occasionally with excellent effect. Here is a charming piece of geography :—

> On the Hellenic board of Crete's fair isle,
> Westward of Drepanon, along a reach
> Which massy Cyamum for many a mile
> Jutting to sea delivers from the breach
> Of North and East—returning to embay
> The favoured shore—an ancient city lay,
> Aptera, which is *Wingless* in our speech.

And again :—

> She came by steep ways to the southern strand,
> Where, sacred to the Twins and Britomart,
> Pent in its rocky theatre apart,
> A little town stood on the level sand.

Very pleasant, too, is the poet's loving

treatment of the magic Greek names, and, with the same delight with which Vergil must have written

> Amphion Dircaeus in Actaeo Aracintho

he gives us this exquisite string of Hellenic jewellery, the nymphs of Poseidon's train :—

> Apseudès and Nemertès, Callianassa,
> Cymothoë, Thaleia, Limnorrhea,
> Clymenè, Ianeira and Ianassa,
> Doris and Panopè and Galatea,
> Dynamenè, Dexamenè and Maira,
> Ferusa, Doto, Proto, Callianeira,
> Amphithoë, Orethuia and Amathea.

Psyche's trials are told with a fine sense of what is demanded by the manner of the poem —with just enough tenderness not to disturb the dreamy detachment of the tale. The almost ecstatic picture of Pan on the river-bank, of Hera's temple, of the kindly tower which saved Psyche from death, and Aphrodite's seagull, are of their kind quite flawless. Of her descent into Hades we see nothing, but we remember it by the exquisite picture of her return, when she

> Gave Cerberus his cake, Charon his fare,
> And saw through Hell's mouth to the purple air,
> And one by one the keen stars melt in day.

I would place *Eros and Psyche* very high among Bridges' work. If not the best, it is

the most beautiful narrative poem in the language. It abounds in lines which Keats would have been glad to write,—things like this :—

> But night was crowding up the barren fells

or,

> A drowned corpse cast up by the murmuring deep

Or this, of Psyche's fatal curiosity :—

> Only of sweet simplicity she fell :—
> Wherein who fall may fall unto the skies.

Even the picture of Psyche has a distant clarity which the least faltering would have marred ; though I confess I do not see in her, with Dr. Warren, " a picture of sweet English girlhood." In truth, the story is told for its own sake, and if the reader wants the true allegory, he may turn to the last stanza :—

> Now in that same month Psyche bare a child,
> Who straight in heaven was namèd Hedonè
> In mortal tongues by other letters styled ;
> Whom all to love, however named, agree :
> Whom in our noble English JOY we call,
> And honour them among us most of all
> Whose happy children are as fair as she.

With the characteristic

> ENVOY
>
> It is my prayer that she may smile on all
> Who read my tale as she hath smiled on me.

XI

CLASSICAL PROSODY

If English prosody is to make any immediate advance from its present standard—if one can give the name to a thing so indefinite—it is not improbable that it will be by way of the quantitative hexameter. Judging the hexameter by the experiments of any poet except Bridges, the prospect would be sufficiently appalling. But Bridges is really the first poet to write the English hexameter at all with a realization of what the form implies. One may dismiss at once the authors of reams of accentual hexameters, of which Clough's work holds both the best and worst examples.

It is to the late Mr. Will Stone that we owe the possibility of such a form in English, and it was at his wish that Bridges made his happy experiments in this manner. It is part of the incredible confusion of thought which garbled prosody into syllabic verse that hardly a single critic or poet has seemed to understand the first principle of the Greek and Latin verse, the nice combat between accent and

quantity which seems to be the only sound basis for a prosody. Mr. Stone[1] showed at least that most attempts at English quantitative verse had been founded upon a misconception not only of the nature of classical forms, but of the necessities which moulded their familiar "rules." The few writers who realized that the hexameter was not merely a matter of a recurrent beat did not get so far as to realize that in Latin, as in Greek, its form resulted inevitably from the inherent stubbornness of the language. To avoid in English what Vergil avoided is only to pile the difficulties of Latin upon our own quite sufficient allowance.

Bridges has developed this point in theory as well as in his experiments.[2] He has done a very necessary service in pointing out that the stereotyped dactyl-trochee ending of a Latin hexameter was the result of sheer necessity. The language refused to take any other form. If Vergil could by any means have reproduced such effects as *νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς*, there can be no possible doubt that he would have done so. His fondness for ending a line with "*hominum rex*," and the pains to which he puts himself to find other monosyllabic

[1] "Classical Metres in English Verse," Oxford, 1901.

[2] Essay on the Vergilian Hexameter, "New Quarterly," January, 1909.

endings are enough to show that he found his chains irksome. The cæsura "rule," too, was formulated by the Latin language. These are the stumbling-blocks that have been cheerfully accepted as objects for imitation by the few English experimenters in classical prosody.

Now it is obvious that if any advance is to be made in the handling of the English hexameter the language must find out rules of its own. That is, the poets who handle it will constantly be delighted by beautiful and suggestive rhythms which cannot be made to take more than an occasional part in the fabric of the verse. Such are those of the beautiful lines from *Ibant Obscuri* :—

Cast him a cake, poppy-drench'd with drowsiness and honey-sweetened,

and

Through Ereban darkness, through fields sown with desolation.

The difficulty of the monosyllabic ending, for which Vergil worked so hard, is, of course, not nearly so hard to overcome in English. Here are some very effective and natural instances from the Vergil version :—

He, rabid, and distending a-hungry his triply-cavern'd jaws.

Red Phlegethon, and huge boulders his roundy bubbles be.

Some o'er whom a hanging black rock, slipping at very
point of
Falling, ever threateneth.

It is nearly always beautiful, and here he uses it in two consecutive lines with exquisite effect :—

. . . the wildwood's
Flow'ry domain, the flushing soft-crowding loveliness of
Spring,
Lazy Summer's burning dial, the serenely solemn spells
Of Sibylline Autumn.

In quite a few experiments Bridges has shown plainly that extremely fine things can be done in English classical prosody. The two epistles, *Wintry Delights* and *To a Socialist in London*, though distinctly cumbrous in construction and not particularly original in thought, hold a surprising number of things that are not only a perfect use of the spirit of the hexameter but very fine poetry as well. They have caught that deliberate fragrance, a hint of essential melody delayed that we may taste and absorb it, a something exquisite yet lasting, that has been missing from European poetry for nearly two thousand years. No doubt this precious quality is partly an association of the metre. There is peculiar joy in speaking English syllables to the cadence of

Those Sicilian swains, whose Doric tongue
After two thousand years is ever young.

It may easily deceive us into reading too much poetic worth into what are, after all, experiments made more or less in the dark. But the very crudeness that so often crops out in the verse has its own charm. It seems to me to have the curious blending of ruggedness and speed that is common in Ennius or Lucretius —poets who were, after all, doing precisely the same thing as Bridges, with less apparent chance of success. Things like

Dono, ducite, doque volentibus cum magnis dis,

or

Curantes magna cum cura tum cupientes
Regni dant operam simul auspicio augurioque

suggest, I think, something of that rapture of realized strength that I find in this :—

Blandly the sun's old heart is stirred to a septennial smile,
Causing strange-fortuned comfort to melancholy mortals.

Or this wonderful picture of the tropical forest :—

. . . That mighty forest, whose wildness offends you,
And silences appal, where earth's life, self-suffocating
Seethes, lavish as sun-life in a red star's fi'ry corona ;
That waste magnificence and vain fecundity, breeding
Giants and parasites embrac'd in flowery tangle,
Interwoven alive and dead, where one tyrannous tree
Blights desolating around it a swamp of rank vegetation ;
Where Reason yet dreams unawakt, and thro' the solemn day
Only the monkey chatters and discordant the parrot screams.

The long line-for-line version from the sixth book of the Æneid is very unequal. It contains, in its four hundred and eighty-seven lines, about thirty-five false quantities. Possibly there are more, for in one or two places one is doubtful of the pronunciation intended. I cannot agree with the author that "a few false quantities do not make a poem less readable." Certainly it is at first no easy matter to think in quantities. But once this difficulty is mastered, as Bridges himself has apparently mastered it, to stumble upon a short vowel in a long position is a painful accident, whether the poem be in English or in Latin. Lines like these are terrible :—

She to the ground downcast *her* eyes in fixity averted.

Soothed with other memories, first *love* and virginal embrace.

Marching in equal *step*, and eager of his coming enquire.

Endeth in Elysi-*um* our path : but that to the leftward.

Such that no battering warfare of *men* or immortals.

The device of placing an acute accent on the false syllable, as though to reinforce it, is unworthy. That of doubling a consonant—

That bright *sprigg* of weird for so long period unseen—

is more picturesque, but it is not always

available. The author would not, for instance, have ventured to write "*lovve*" in the second of the lines quoted.

But in spite of its false quantities and frequent liberties with the text, the version is a very fine piece of work. There are places where it fails badly; but there are others where it is nearly as good as the original. Here is a terribly inadequate version of a wonderful line :—

. . . an' on the second morn
Saw, when a great wave raised me aloft, the Italyan highlands.

But in two lines at least it is better than the original,—the translation, already quoted, of

Ecce gubernator sese Palinurus agebat,
qui Libyco nuper cursu, dum sidera servat
exciderat puppi, mediis diffusus in undis.

Above all, it is Vergilian. There is no other version, even in a far less difficult manner, that has approached the Vergilian strength and tenderness, as in lines like these :—

Now to the wind and tidewash a sport my poor body rolleth,

or

Here 'tis a place of ghosts, of night and drowsy delusion :
Forbidden unto living mortals is my Stygian keel :

or this magnificent translation of the farewell to Deiphobus :—

That last terrible night
Thou wert said to hav' exceeded thy bravery, an' only
On thy faln enemies wert faln by weariness o'ercome.
Wherefor' upon the belov'd seashore thy empty sepulchral
Mound I erected, aloud on thy ghost tearfully calling.
Name and shield keep for thee the place, but thy body, dear friend,
Found I not, to commit to the land ere sadly I left it.

Very beautiful, too, are the few elegiacs in the collection—and here the technical difficulties are greater, for the pentameter does not lend itself at all easily to the English vocabulary. The four epitaphs are among the most beautiful things Bridges ever wrote. The first of them attains, by some miracle, the true accent of the best epitaphs in the Anthology. What English epigram was ever so magnificently simple and tender as this ?—

Fight well, my comrades, and prove your bravery. Me too
God call'd out, but crown'd early before the battle.

The fourth has a passion that is quite un-Greek, though it moves superbly in the chains of its metre. It has rather the fire and subtlety of some fine *englyn*[1] :—

Where thou art better I too were, dearest, anywhere, than
Wanting thy well-lov'd presence anywhere.

I suppose the chief difficulty in the way of

[1] A form in which one always feels that Bridges might have done wonderful work.

writing English verse in classical metres is the lack of words ending in a short open vowel. The result is an enforced use of more spondees than the metre can reasonably be expected to bear. The apparent stiffness which at present strikes one in most dactylic lines which may be metrically quite sound is principally the result of unfamiliarity. With a little use the mechanism should run smoothly enough. But the other difficulty is more serious, and I think it will have to be partly met by conventionalizing certain departures from strict form. Bridges has made a move in this direction in his use of " and the " or " in the " as the second half of a dactyl, writing them, not very prettily, as " an' the " " i' the." Small proclitic words generally will bear a good deal of shortening without any offence against proper diction. I foresee another danger in the readiness with which endings of the type of " *caverned jaws,*" " *bubbles be,*" " *sudden smile,*" suggest themselves. In fact any monosyllabic noun beginning with a consonant preceeded by any disyllabic, iambic adjective, will form the end of a hexameter. This threatens to become the commonest type of ending. Singly it is excellent; but after a few successive lines it has a very irritating effect. The lack of short open final syllables

makes the pentameter a tough problem. I do not believe that the English hexameter will ever be really successful, though excellent things may be done in it; but it is evident that if English prosody is to make any advance from its present standard the element of quantity will have to be definitely recognized. Poets will have to learn to think in quantities. The hexameter with its great traditions will be the most convenient field for the experiment.

XII

CONCLUSIONS

THE small collection of pieces which are grouped together under the heading of *Later Poems* in the Oxford Edition and have all appeared since the close of the nineteenth century are of less importance than one might imagine. Beside the other work of this period, which includes *Demeter* as well as the *Poems in Classical Prosody*, they are inconsiderable. I do not suggest that they are lacking in colour or in beauty, though the whole collection falls far below the attainment of any book of the *Shorter Poems;* but they do not show the concentration of form, the enthusiasm for perfection, which infects the reader of almost all his other work. It is as though the hand were a little tired, and ready to accept forms of expression which the eager mind has long ago outgrown. Apart from the first Elegy, the thoughtful *Recollections of Solitude*, there is little that holds one: even the trivial domestic pieces such as *Millicent*

are not as happy as those of the previous volume, while the forced sprightliness of the *Epistle on Instinct* is hardly to be borne. One passage, at least, cannot be forgotten—the beautiful sestet of the sonnet addressed to Thomas Floyd, which seems to me one of the rarest tributes Oxford has ever received in poetry.

> The lovely city, thronging tower and spire,
> The mind of the wide landscape, dreaming deep,
> Grey-silvery in the vale ; a shrine where keep
> Memorial hopes their pale celestial fire :
> Like man's immortal conscience of desire,
> The spirit that watcheth in me ev'n in my sleep.

It is obvious, too, that the Odes written for Sir Hubert Parry's musical settings have no place in so serious a volume as the Collected Works. It is disheartening to one who has compared the spirit of the Nature poems with that of the enchanted morning of L'Allegro to stumble on such a careless imitation of the original as :—

> Or in some wallèd orchard nook
> She communes with her ancient book,
> Beneath the branches laden low ;
> While the high sun o'er bosomed snow
> Smiteth all day the long hill-side
> With ripening cornfields waving wide.
>
> There if thou linger all the year,
> No jar of man can reach thine ear,

Or sweetly comes, as when the sound
From hidden villages around,
Threading the woody knolls, is borne
Of bells that dong the Sabbath morn.

The inclusion of the octave of that fine sonnet "Rejoice ye dead, where'er your spirits dwell" only serves to show up the loose construction of the verse that surrounds it. That the Ode is eminently suited for musical treatment I would not for a moment deny; indeed it is probable that if the poetry had been as finely fashioned as usual, no musician could have set it. Indeed it is significant that none of the *Shorter Poems*, many of which are as good "stuff"—to use Wagner's expression—for music as the lyrics of Mörike or Heine, to which a resemblance has been traced, have yet found an adequate musical setting. Of course, the *Ode to Music* is a much more satisfying libretto from the poetic standpoint, than, say, the words of the great love duet in the second act of Tristan, which are not poetry at all. I quote at random :—

Mein Tristan!
Mein Isolde!
Tristan!
Isolde!
Mein und dein!
Immer ein!
Ewig, ewig ein!

But if the poet has seen fit to leave so many gaps in his expression for the musician to supply, he should not venture to offer us the skeleton as poetry. Unaided by the eloquence of an orchestral setting, a great part of these two odes means very little more (even though it reads very much better) than the string of words which I have quoted.

It so happens that the second of these poems, and the last of the volume, comes to a close with that sturdy hymn "Gird on thy sword, O man; thy strength endue," and thereby suggests a characteristic which we have already noticed: the strong religious sense of which one is always conscious in reading Bridges' poetry. His first complete work, *The Growth of Love*, reaches its culmination in the splendid and sonorous paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, a thing informed with the fair strength of early Gothic. At the end of the fourth book of *Shorter Poems* (originally the end of the series) comes the finely simple *Laus Deo*.

> Let praise devote thy work, and skill employ
> Thy whole mind, and thy heart be lost in joy.

All three poems give the effect, which I cannot think unintentional, of a dedication, while the last actually defines the poet's attitude of spontaneous praise for the gift of beauty, leading "the pilgrim soul to beauty above";

and I think one is often aware of this devotional feeling in places where it is implied rather than expressed. Nothing, indeed, could be more simple and straightforward than the spirit of those poems which are definitely religious. In none of them—and besides those which I have mentioned there are not more than half a dozen, exclusive of the translations in the Yattendon Hymnal—is there any attempt to explain the mysteries of religion by those imaginative symbols which weight some poems of Francis Thompson like the mock jewels incrusted upon a gilded chasuble. This, it may be urged, is only to say that in this particular case, as in others, Bridges is not a mystic, but the point has more than a negative value. These religious poems show a positive simplification of method, a deliberate sacrifice of all decoration, which is remarkable in the work of a man who has embroidered his verse so richly. This is a very fine simplicity; it lends an added dignity to work which has never failed to be dignified.

Of his spiritual courage we have already seen a token in his ready acceptance of life as it is. The unwavering optimism, the steadiness of faith which tempers his stoicism, are qualities which make him a most heartening companion; when, as in the climax of those

stanzas written in dejection, "Wherefore to-night so full of care," he breaks out into this pæan of gladness :—

> O happy life! I hear thee sing,
> O rare delight of mortal stuff!
> I praise my days for all they bring
> Yet are they only not enough,

or when, beneath the shadow of death's wing, he urges the sorrowing father to

> Gather his faith together, and his strength make stronger.

I do not wish to labour a point which has been already expounded, but it seems to me that the consideration of these religious poems, or rather of the religious sense pervading all his poetry, has only brought us back to another aspect of the essential directness of outlook which appeared so characteristically in the lyrical work, in the sonnets and in the two Epistles, for this is a quality which provides a key to the whole of his poetic method, imaginative or technical. It is responsible for the prevailing sense of nature clearly seen and expressed as clearly in the *Shorter Poems*, showing us that this cunning worker in colours is also a master of pure line. It determines the fastidiousness of his choice of material, the scrupulous care submitting each fine phrase to the judgment of that tribunal where (to

quote from one of the sonnets) "the master reason sits"; so that it is difficult to find in any of these poems an imaginative epithet or figure, however widely suggestive, which cannot ultimately be justified in that high court; and this, I imagine, is why there is so little in all his work that is obscure or equivocal. The singular freshness of vision, as of one whose eyes are unclouded by experience, which he has brought to the study of nature, pervades also his philosophy of life; and in this connection one sees that the isolation from "life's meagre affairs" which I have already deplored in his equipment as a dramatist, may atone in candour for what it assuredly loses in breadth. Again, the conscious severity of such poems as the *Laus Deo* and the Lord's Prayer Sonnet, marks a type of religious feeling which is found in its perfection throughout the Liturgy of the English Church, and the orthodox version of the Bible. They are inspired with the undecorate spirituality of the Anglican faith; and it is this spirit which places them, along with the nature poems which we have already examined, among the most English things in the language, typical of the English genius, and English taste at its finest. The intense racial quality in Bridges' poetry, apart from all questions

of imaginative or technical excellence, should make it work of rare significance in our literature.

It is a curious paradox that in making a final estimate of a poet so peculiarly English, a parallel should suggest itself in the judgment of a French novelist upon an intensely French musician; but the passage is so strikingly applicable and such a fair summary of his genius, that I quote it. After an acute recognition of Debussy's "*honte hautaine de l'emotion,*" M. Rolland writes :—

> Il a, entre tous ses dons, une qualité qu'on ne trouve à un tel degré chez presque aucun autre grand musicien . . . c'est le génie du goût. Il l'a jusqu'à l'excès, jusqu'à lui sacrifier au besoin les autres éléments de l'art, les forces tumultueuses—jusqu'à l'appauvrissement apparent de la vie. Mais il ne faut pas s'y tromper. Cet appauvrissement n'est qu'apparent. Il-y-a dans toute l'œuvre une passion voilée.

THE END

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